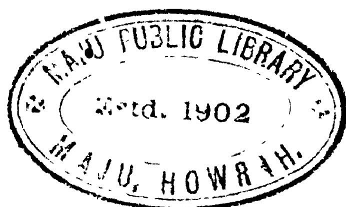
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SEETHING DAYS

A ROMANCE OF TUDOR TIMES



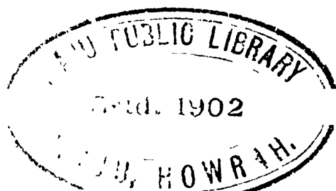
BY

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SEETHING DAYS.

A TALE OF TUDOR TIMES.

A NARRATIVE OF PART OF THE LIFE OF THE HONOURED SIR MARTIN ASTELE, PRIEST, SOMETIME CURATE OF THE PARISH OF WYMBLETON, AND OF HIS KIN, BY ME, HARRY STURE.

In this history I have related nought but that which hath come to me either through my own witness of the things which chanced, or through the papers and diary of Sir Martin Astele, or from the words of those who themselves acted or saw that which they told. Yet for the convenience of my narrative, and lest it should be over-burdened with digressions, I have not always set down by what means each thing was known to me, saying, "This did I see myself," "Thus wrote Sir Martin," "This heard I from such a one," but have told the story straight on, saying, "Thus it chanced," "So spake Sir Martin," judging that thus I shall not weary my readers with impertinent matter, but may the more readily and simply tell my tale.

CHAPTER I.

'TWAS April of the year of grace 1551, being the fifth year of King Edward, when I, a young man just attached to the household of Mr. Secretary Cecil, afterwards His Grace

of Burleigh, journeyed unto Wymbleton where my lord then lay. Blithe of cheer was I, though withal something fearful in my mind, seeing that it was a great honour to be appointed of Mr. Secretary's household; great indeed for me, a young gentleman of no large fortune, and much alone in the world, my parents being both some years dead, and I but lately called from our old house in Devonshire, by my uncle, Sir Nicholas Sture, who had gained me this advancement. Much and gravely did the good knight admonish me. "Mr. Secretary Cecil," he said, "bids me send thee to him straightway. For my sake he will receive thee: for his further favour thou must depend on thyself. Thy foot is on the ladder. See thou climb warily. These are perilous times, but a man who is cautious and fearless may go far; and in my judgment there is no man more proper to whom thou mayest attach thyself than Mr. William Cecil, who, as I well opine, shall one day lead the State."

Herein did my uncle, who knew that great man well, show a sagacity which I had many times occasion to discern in him. "But see," he said, "that thou serve him well and discreetly, for he

is not one who will tolerate a fool's service. Be prompt of thought yet humble. Remember that zeal will not excuse an indiscretion, neither will fear excuse a weakness."

In this discourse my uncle set before me a path not easy to follow for an untried youth: the way was strait, and there were pit-falls on either hand, seeing that much caution breeds in a man a timid weakness, while should he cast from him fear, he may well seem indiscreet.

Remembering the kindnesses shown to me now through many years by the Lord Treasurer, it is strange to me to recall those tremblings which took me as I marvelled what manner of man he should prove. Yet were my uncle's words and warnings well grounded in truth, and save our present great and glorious Queen, at whose awful frown all life and spirit must fail from the boldest heart, there lives no being on earth whose wrath I should so dread as my master's.

For all my fearfulness I was merry on that spring day riding through a fair and excellent land, with a good steed under me, and two stout serving men to follow. We kept a needful look to our weapons, for there were many disorderly and riotous persons

abroad, who worked not, and might threaten violence. But our hap was to journey peacefully enough.

For the greater part of the day our way had lain through a very fair country, being a great heath which extendeth for many miles north and west of Wymbleton. Here is indeed a noble land. One while we passed through woods where great elms did very well thrive, and mighty oaks, and here were beds of primroses set so thick that there was not room for a hand between, and among them did the white wind flowers rear their heads, and ground ivy here and there very profuse shed a blue tint over the earth. Because the trees were not yet come to their full leaf, the light of the sun gleamed between their tender green, and caused them to shine with a delicate brightness.

Anon we came upon more open heath, the grass soft and fine starred with tiny flowers as eyebright, and the tormentil potent in some sicknesses. At intervals were set clumps of hazel and of birch, and great tracks of gorse grow in many parts, also masses of tall ferns out from which the deer oft started. Of hares we saw not few, and of conies great plenty, as of partridges and pheasants. Also

the whole air was full of the joyous singing of birds as merles and mavises and nightingales, for I can aver of my own knowledge that it is but a foolish fable which saith that these birds sing only by night. The larks be many in these parts, and kept up a merry strain, for no sooner had we passed out of hearing of one of them than we did see another in the blue sky. Here and there were pools of water, still, but sweet, for they be fed by springs, and true it is that one must needs ride warily for the streamlets trickle through the grass unseen, and make a great dampness in many parts. The heron fishes here, and there is much wild fowl.

Now as we grew something weary, and evening drew on, we deemed that we had come nigh unto Wymbleton, and presently we were assured by the sight of herds of the cottagers' pigs, and of cows and asses having right of pasturage on the common, that we must be drawing on to the village. The sun was setting, and never may I forget the sight as we came out upon a little mound and drew rein to breathe our horses. Here might we see far away across to the blue hills in the distance, and the thick trees of Coombe. In front was open heath very rich with gorse in flower, and in the

midst a little blue mere. The sky was mixed of rose and gold, and then as it might have been a bar of iron lay across it, red hot above and black beneath, and below that a line of pale sea green or blue, one could scarce wot which, and the sun issued from the cloud as a great golden ball ready to sink behind the trees; and in the mere was all this glory reflected, so that it shone like fire. Behold, as I gazed and could not refrain my eyes from gazing, two maidens issued from a little thicket near and stood still, and I forgot the sunset to look at them, for one was the fairest woman I ever beheld. They were on a little mound beneath a great oak, through which the light fell easily, and behind them was a thicket of holly very dark, and thus would a limner have loved to make the background of that most sweet picture, seeing that their beauty shone light against the shadow, minding me of the fair nymph Pity that shines most to admiration near the darkest woe.

She that stood foremost was tall beyond the usual stature of women, her face of a beauteous white and red, her air majestical, but her countenance sweet as becomes a woman, her hair of an admir-

able red gold, her eyes as the eyes of a fawn, large, brown and well opened. Her hood was something thrown back, and she stood as one who waits listening, intent with her whole being. The other maid I might not so well see, for she had drawn her muffler across her face, and held it tight with one little hand; only some threads of hair of the colour and softness of the silk as it comes from the worm, escaped and waved in the breeze. Also I could not choose but observe her voice as she spoke, for it was as a note of music so clear and sweet.

"Oh, Coz, Coz," she said, "come back. It is not meet for damsels to wait here at eventide. Indeed, indeed, it is not well."

"Go, thou, thou faint heart," answered the other, "I fear not to be alone."

I marvelled that with such a face her tones were less pleasing than her companion's.

. So intent were they on their discourse and their purpose that they noted not my company, and while I delayed to advance the smaller maiden spoke again.

"I fear, but I should fear as much for thee did I leave thee. Cecily, sweet, think of thy father's anger did he see thee here."

"I think," she answered, "of my true love's pain should he not see me. Knowest thou not all else weighs as dust in the balance? My father's harshness doth but bind me to my love."

Then at a little rustle in the bushes she turned herself and ran a few steps forwards, crying "He is come!"

She recoiled quickly, for forth issued from the thicket a very ill-favoured wretch, ragged, brawny and powerful.

"Oh! ho! comrades, a prize!" he cried. "A very tender hind. Yea, two. Dainty hunting!"

Herewith he caught her dress, while two greasy-jerkined scoundrels who followed him shouted—

"Hurrah! for bully Hob. Trust him to scent the quarry."

The maid with a shriek wrenched herself away and fled, he pursuing, and I rode forward calling, "Hands off, foul knave!" By evil chance the little mound was steep and slippery; my steed lost foothold and caught his hind hoof in a coney hole: he stumbled, fell, and rolled over with my leg beneath him. The ground was soft and uneven else ill had been my fate, and though uninjured I could not at first release myself, wherefore those

silly varlets, Luke and Dick, must needs dismount to pull me up. In vain I called, "Dolts, aid the lady!" Dick blubbered and said, "Holy Virgin help us; for sure his leg is broke." Luke said stubbornly, "Let the damsels bide, master. Our work is with you."

As I struggled to free myself, I saw how the villains, deeming we could no longer make or mar in the matter, pressed forward on their prey. The poor girl's petticoat caught on a bramble and stayed her flight. Then the slight maiden stepped before her friend and faced her foes right bravely. Her voice rang out clear and commanding, "Hob Ploughman, I know thee. Shame on thee, Hob! At thy wife's begging I gave her food even now."

The foremost wretch stopped abashed for a moment, and those who were following were frighted when they found that they were known, but he she called Hob, who, as I could well perceive, had drunk of the ale-cup more than enough, soon overcame his momentary mood of grace, and cried shamelessly, "I'll pay thee, pretty chuck. I'll kiss thee for't."

She slipped from his grasp, and holding fast her friend who, in her distraction, would have run

towards the common away from our company, she drew her by the hand a little way towards us saying fearlessly, " Back, we have help at hand."

By this I had got my foot clear, and wrenched myself from Luke's officious grasp, for he clasped my leg by the ankle, to feel if it were broken, so tight that I must needs hop a step before I could get free; which doing I sent him over backwards by a kick which did convince him no bones were broken, and drew my sword. I verily believe the fellow Hob would have met my onset with a great quarter-staff that he had, being pot-valiant, had he not seen Dick coming also, and Luke gathering himself slowly up, and that his companions had deserted him, and were running for their lives; wherefore he scowled upon us, muttered with a curse that we had spoiled a good game, and plunged into the thicket.

I let him go unharmed, having more care to attend to the maidens who trembled very much. Wherefore, before even I saw to my poor steed I doffed my cap and bade them fear no more, for that the varlets fled.

"We thank *you* for it, sir," answered the little lass. Her muffler had fallen back, and showed a

face delicate, sweet, and fresh, that minded me of the brier rose on a May morning.* "Sweet Cis, recall thy courage," she said, for the other had sunk upon the ground, and could say no word. With deft hands and dainty touches, like the movements of a bird, her friend did rearrange for her her disordered kirtle and wimple, prattling the while like a child, joyous at her release from danger. She had numbered at the most but fifteen summers.

"All the saints be thanked," quoth she, "that you came hither, sir, at this moment, for indeed they are very evil men in their cups. You may judge that they stand at nought to attack us so boldly. I was mightily afeared. Cis, thou hast words at will. Help me to thank this gentleman."

"'Tis I have right to thank the saints that I had the favour to be of service to you, fair mistresses," I replied.

"Cis, art thou not better? Rouse thee to come home." So she went on, "Think us not unmaidenly, sir, to have ventured thus abroad. Who could fear danger with the houses nigh at

* Bacon gives roses as flowers in May. The month began, of course, later than at present.

hand. Do you travel towards Wymbleton? We are but a stone's throw away. I am Lettis Alanson,* niece to Sir Martin Astele,† curate of Wymbleton, and this is my cousin, Mistress Cecily Astele."

"Lettis," quoth Mistress Cecily, "thou wouldst prattle on the scaffold. I cannot cease to shudder. Sir, believe me," she added, rising up to her stately height. "We are much beholden to your goodness."

I asked their leave to attend them to a place of safety, the which they joyfully accepted.

My fellow, Luke, who for that he had known me as a youngster had not the deference he should have had, quoth then—

* From a monument in Wimbledon Church, it appears that one Philip Lewston married as his second wife Lettis Alanson, in the early part of the sixteenth century. The youngest child, Katharine, survived the others, and came into the Lewston property. She married William Walter, a Northamptonshire man, and they had at this time been living in Wimbledon about four years, having settled there in 1547. Our Lettis appears to have been a daughter of a younger brother of the first Lettis Alanson, and it is probable that Sir Martin owed the curacy to the interest of the Lewston or Walter family, probably backed up by Cecil, since Sir Martin was evidently remarkable both for learning and goodness, and it is known that Cecil was very anxious to raise the standard among the parish clergy. Wimbledon up to Henry VIII.'s time belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

† The title of Sir was usually given to parish priests.

"Tarry not in the doing, master. You may have those fellows back with a rabble anon."

Mistress Cecily rose to her feet, sore affrighted, but Luke went on grumbling.

"Here's the gelding that his worship, your uncle, valued at a hundred shillings. A body would think, Master Hal, you set more store by a couple of young maids than by a rare beast like that, that you pay no heed to whether he is dead or alive."

"See to him, sir, I pray you," quoth Mistress Lettis.

I bade Luke be silent, or he should rue it as he deserved, being wrath to be flouted by a serving man, with words so discourteous towards the damsels, nor could I see that the horse had suffered any harm. But that was Luke's manner, a strange and surly fellow though a trusty. He had felt the weight of my arm for his insolence, but that both the damsels prayed me to move forward, wherefore bidding my varlets mount, and leading my steed, I wended along with the maidens, and told them of my name and state, and that I was to be of Sir William Cecil's household, whereat Mistress Cecily said—

"A fearsome man!"

Quoth Mistress Lettis, "Nay, Coz, he is always right gentle to me, and takes a pleasure in discoursing with my uncle, as indeed well he may, for there is not so learned a clerk in all the country."

"A wise priest," quoth I, "and you, my gracious mistresses, may certes easily command his good will. What is he like to prove to a young untried member of his household?"

"Just and true," quoth one; the other, "Cold and hard. They who would have his favour must walk within the narrow path he sets, and find it too by watching of his slightest glances. He meets displeasure who doth not trim his course to follow the master's mind and desires, though he hath never said one word to show that mind."

"Sweet Coz, speak not so rashly," said Mistress Lettis, and she gave a somewhat anxious glance at my face. Wherefore I said, smiling, their words were safe with me, and that for my part I must walk straight-forward and simply, trusting that this should please Mr. Secretary. To turn and twist and watch a man's humour like a fawning cur that cocks his ears and droops his tail at the master's whim, for this I am not skilled.

We had now crossed the dell, and passing down a short green path, we left the heath, and saw on the one hand a few houses of the common folk, and on the other a green field or two. Mistress Cecily did cast ever and anon hurried glances hither and thither, and her fears being abated, she was even disposed to linger, but Mistress Lettis did hurry her little dainty steps, casting no glance around. Suddenly a young gallant appeared coming swiftly towards us, at whose sight a rosy flush did mount into Mistress Cecily's cheeks and mightily enhance her beauty. Mistress Lettis drew her pretty brows together into a frown. Hers was ever the frank displeasure of a child, as real, as open, and as easily appeased.

"I pray thee, sweet Coz, tarry not," she said, somewhat low, to her companion.

Mistress Cecily, her hands half stretched out, and her eyes very bright, stepped towards him, but she drew back again, with a yet deeper flush of pain as of one chidden by a friend, when he uncovered with a certain stately ceremony, saying—

"Mistress Cecily, and you Mistress Lettis, I commend me to you. You walk late. 'Tis well you are attended by this—young gentleman."

He laid a stress upon the word "young," which was something provoking. Also his dress was of the latest courtly fashion, and as he spoke he glanced from my hat to my hose, and my cloak to my points. Ere I could speak Mistress Cecily said hurriedly that I had saved them at need.

"In verity," quoth he as one astonished.

But when I said some lewd fellows purposed to insult the damsels, he interrupted me with sudden fury, crying—

"They shall rue it, by God's power."

His eyes were the strangest I ever saw, having, when angry, a sort of tawny light in them.

"This gentleman did swiftly fright them away," said Mistress Lettis.

He paid no heed to her, but said, "What like were they? Speak, young sir."

I liked not his rude imperious tone, therefore I answered shortly that the folk were unknown to me. Whereat Mistress Lettis looked comforted.

"Which way went they? Mistresses, did ye not know them?" he asked.

"I was too frighted to take note," quoth Mistress Cecily. Her cousin speaking somewhat stiffly,

as one who would be gracious yet liked it not, turned towards the gallant.

"'Twere best, Master Fowell, you did escort us to my uncle's door, seeing that this gentleman's way doth here divide from ours, as he wends to Mr. Cecil's."

"Come with us, Master Fowell," quoth Mistress Cecily, softly.

His dark face lightened somewhat. "Your commands are my law," quoth he; "afterwards," and again his brows contracted, "I will find these scoundrels."

"We will not be out again so late," quoth Mistress Lettis, with a little malice in her tone.

"There shall not be an inch of ground unsafe for woman or child," quoth he. "I will take order."

They pointed out to me the entrance to Mr. Cecil's ground, and I entering, they passed on towards the little church which lay not two stone-throws off, peaceful in the evening light.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SECRETARY dwelt in the Rectory House which overlooketh the park appertaining to the manor of Wymbleton. In the days whereof I write the manor belonged to the Crown, as did also the Manor House, a substantial building of no great pretension, given later by our present most gracious Queen to Sir Nicholas Hatton.* Nor were the gardens then of much account, but the large park did always have in it a rare and wild beauty.

Mr. Secretary's house which, as I have said, did lie hard by the park, he held in lease of sixty years from the Dean and Chapter of Worcester, to whom the Rectory of Wymbleton doth belong, they providing a curate for the service of the church, and

* It was bought from Sir Nicholas Hatton by Sir Thomas Cecil, who built a very fine house there.

appointing unto him a meet residence. The Rectory, though but a small dwelling, for one of my master's consideration, is far above the housing of a curate, being fitted for the residence of the rectors when they did reside here, seeing that the great tithes are considerable. It is a long house built of white stone, the rooms many and commodious but not large; attached are two good stables for coaches, and stalls for fourteen horses. The house standeth east and west, the entrance-gate of the grounds being to the northward. Approaching from the common one must pass the house before he enters it, then having come within a fair gateway of stone with the Cecil arms right seemly carved on either post, I found myself within a very pleasant court. In the centre was a fair plot of turf, in the midst whereof rose a fountain, and a nymph, nobly carved of a right gracious bearing, poured forth the water from her urn held well on high.. On my left hand beyond the grass plot and mountain did stretch away sundry alleys of box and privet trimmed very quaintly, and beyond these again the garden was bounded by trees of mingled sorts, as of elm and ash, also cedars and firs. Before me to the south the ground sloped

gently upward, set here and there with yews, and at the top of the ascent did stand the church, with white walls and red tiled roof, and venerable with grey lichen on its walls.

On my right hand lay the house, and behind me a most noble prospect. Here the ground did descend something abruptly, so that one might see the most part of the park, set here and there with clumps and thickets of thorn and privet, and dotted with very stately trees. Towards the east a large mere did stretch out in the valley, and beyond again lay rising grounds and wood.

Having told my name and quality, I was bidden to an apartment where I should cleanse the soils of my journey, and presently advised that Mr. Secretary, being something busied that evening, would receive me the following day. Meanwhile supper was prepared for me in a fair chamber, the rushes marvellously sweet and fresh.

As I refreshed myself with a choice pasty and ale of the best, I did think gaily of my future life, as one who had fair promise of pleasant days. I did advise me how I should bear myself towards Mr. Cecil, feeling, spite all adverse discourse concerning him, of a good courage and stout heart, to please

him with honest service, and, in some fashion or other, to make my way in the world. I deemed it a good omen that my first adventure had been with so sweet companions; and therewith I began to wonder concerning them, and what they did on the heath. Just then a step echoed upon the stones without, and I heard a voice, both powerful and melodious, singing snatches of song—

'With a hey, Nell, and a ho, Nell!
Sweet Nell for me.
Where the wild throstles dwell
I'll sing to thee.

Every bird hath its mate;
Mating are we.
Care hide thy frowsy pate;
Wake jollity!"

The hanging was drawn aside, and there entered the gentleman who had met us as we passed the hamlet. The superciliousness and the anger had both passed from his manner, which was gay and courteous. Now that his countenance was lighted up with cheerfulness, he appeared of a comely visage; his features were well formed, though somewhat sharp, the brow very prominent over the eyes.

"I speak to one of Mr. Secretary's household?" quoth I, as we saluted.

"In truth, sir, yea, sir," he answered; "an unworthy member of it, seeing, I fear me, I do fail something of its great gravity and decorum. Now, by the twinkle of your eye, I trust I meet a fellow sinner."

"If it be a sin to love mirth, I own mine offending," quoth I.

"I pledge you," said he, reaching out to the flagon. "Prim as a nun's hen is the ordering here. The sack is good, and comforteth the heart, else should one die of doleful dumps." And again he sang, in his rich voice—

"Should a fair maid,
Merry or staid,
Bring, in her white hands, the can,
She doubleth her sweetness,
And showeth her meetness,
To win a kind kiss from a man.

Am I alone,
Crusty old Joan
Beareth in brown hands the can;
Despite her ill-favour,
She mars not the flavour
That gives a gay heart to a man."

"It joyeth me to perceive," quoth I, "that in this

drear abode you have comforts, as song and wine," for it seemed to me that he was scarce ordering himself with the gravity of which he spoke.

He laughed: "Also I am now blest with some creature under forty with whom to hold converse. I find little pleasure in a lonely feast. These are my thanksgivings for your coming."

He cast at me, as he stroked his peaked beard, a keen, shrewd glance, that contrasted something oddly with his heedless merriment. He seemed to question what I thought of him. And I, crediting little of his last remark, passed it by, and inquired of him if he had been long in Mr. Secretary's household.

"Some two years—since I took on me the grace of the priesthood," he said, with a sneer and a sudden darkening of all his face, that showed it again as it looked when first I saw it.

"Priest!" quoth I, in much amazement.

He laughed, and his face changed again.

"'Tis passing strange, truly. On their heads be it who did force me thereunto. Yet why should I talk thus? The priests of our fathers' time were jovial fellows enough in secret. Shall we of the new lights have less freedom? I trow not.

Saith not the holy Saint Paul, 'All things are lawful'? Aye, and that they are cursed who forbid meats and marrying. Cursed be they, say I."

"What meanest thou? Thou wouldst not have priests wedded?" I questioned.

"Certes, no!" he answered, in a jibing tone. "A priest is not as other men. He hath no passions. You chain up your dog to make him fierce; but for men's affections, bind them tight, and dream they shall not raven like wolves, but be gentle as lambs."

There uprose before my eyes a vision of the lovely maid I had rescued, and of the light in her eyes when she looked upon this man, and I exclaimed with heat, "Unworthy he that would drag a woman down to be that public scorn, a priest's wife!" For in truth in those days, in the west country, we did deem very lightly of such.

"They lie in their beards that call them so!" he cried. Then, cooling down, "We will not quarrel. Each man to his humour. I welcome a stranger ill with controversy. Besides, I think that I have interest in you beyond a stranger. Are you not one of the Stures of Ridgcumbe?"

I answered "Yea."

"Then," said he, "we are sib; for my mother was Anne Fountayne, whose sister was given in marriage unto Harry Sture."

"My father and mother!" quoth I. "Of a surety we are cousins. How strange the chances of this world!"

"Not so strange, after all," quoth he. "Mr. Secretary knoweth something of our families, and hath been pleased to make me of his household, as also he hath pleasured the good knight your uncle in receiving you. Yet if not strange, a right pleasant chance. Shall I do a cousinly part, and sketch for you the unknown land to which you have ventured? I will give you a chart if you will, the bogs and shaky places nicely marked, and where you may tread safely."

Though his manner did not altogether please me, yet I was glad to have found one of mine own kin. I thanked him for his courtesy, and prayed him to proceed.

"With whom, then, shall I begin?" he asked. "Will you have the head first—the mount of promotion, if I may so say. Good. Expect a man grave, stern, sedate; who, if he reprove not

the freaks and fancies of youth, o'erlooks them only as beneath his notice. Marry, should they interfere with his will or humour, you shall hear of them soon enough! How like you the picture?"

"I like it well," I answered.

"Say you so?" he said; "and on my life I deem you shall please him. He loveth a frank eye, and that you have; and a discreet tongue, and with that too I credit you. He, whose counsel may be known of none, loveth easy reading of others. Also, as he is like a good ship that answereth to, and trims its course by, all the gales of heaven, so it is convenient to him that his following be not given to rash comments."

Now, seeing there did seem to me some malice in this, I exercised the use of my discreet tongue to bring him from this part of his discourse, and asked who came next in the picture gallery.

"Surely," said he, "Master Thomas, the son; for he is as like unto his father as a little nut to a big one. Perchance the little nut is empty, for I think not Master Thomas hath the keen wit of his elder. But for the outside ordering, in truth 'tis passing strange to see this little vessel, that doth

carry but eleven years, trimmed like the great ship with all its burden. And 'I trow,' saith he, or 'meseems,' with a most imposing dignity. His very shoes are tied with Mr. Secretary's precise knot. The mother was but of poor origin, though had she lived till now, she had seen her brother raised high." *

I inquiring whether Mr. Secretary had now no wife, he answered, "Surely, know you not that he hath ta'en to himself a second helpmate? A wife, sir, is an ornament of dignity, and a convenience of housekeeping; also a cord of alliance wherewith we do bind ourselves to other families. Trust me, our great Mr. Cecil could not be without a thing so useful, or choose other than a paragon. The marvel of her age is she—beauteous, and learned, and discreet, and of great connection. Marry, to us poor mortals she hath but one fault, which is that so many perfections are as hurtful as a glare of light in an overwindowed room, and show our failings as clearly."

"'Tis small marvel if her stepson be ruled to

* Cecil's first wife, with whom he fell in love at Cambridge, was Mary, sister of John Cheke, afterwards Sir John Cheke, and tutor to Edward VI. Her father was university bedell, and her mother kept a wine shop.

so straight a course," quoth I. "Pray you tell me of what family she is, lest I should shame myself in not knowing."

"Marry," said he, "of a learned one. She is daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, of Gidea Hall, Essex, governor to our most gracious King. 'Tis said she hath more learning than any other woman in England. 'Tis she I doubt who hath chosen the tutor who trains the young shoot. She hath had children of her own, but they thrive not."

Then I inquired what like was the tutor, and he informed me, "A most learned man. If he pare his nails he will give you Latin citation to prove it a right act. He would not eat could he not find written authority in the ancients for such a practice. He loveth 'an innocent jest,' as he saith. Forsooth, 'tis a hard matter to laugh, for they be of this order. His pupil let fall a piece of meat. 'Child,' said the tutor, 'thou art like Nicias of Athens who let his food drop.' Quoth his father, being a merry man, 'Son, wilt thou feed thy legs?' Then must our young Thomas first laugh, and afterwards learn the story in the Greek, for said he, 'Est quiddam gestus edendi.'* I warrant you he hath dropped no meat

* *Ovid*, "One's mode of eating is of some importance."

since. Master Ambrose is on great terms of friendship with Master Bellot the steward."

I asked if he were also so learned. "Nay," quoth he, "but he listens open-mouthed. His lore is to settle an account, and he is skilled in the cost of beeves and the appointments of the serving men. He is the prose of life personified, lean, tall, and sour visaged."

Besides these he did inform me there were among the principal of the household, Mr. Cecil's chief secretary. "Master Bluet, a man," said he, "of secrets and of whispers, his mouth shut like a trap as if to guard his words; also the physician, an enthusiast in his art: say not your finger aches or he shall drench you with a potion. Now for the summing up of my maxims. Be wary with Mr. Secretary, defer to his lady, laugh with Master Ambrose if you can, and if you would please make some question to him of the classics; be friends with the steward, and leave Master Henage alone, and lastly, purvey you as much of mirth as you may in the which I will aid you, or surely you will die of dulness, and your epitaph be "Stifled by the wisdom of the aged."

Herewith we parted, and I was glad to betake

me to my rest, and to a slumber something disturbed, for in my dreams I did again rescue lovely damsels, and hear once more the singing and the mocking words of Master Fowell.

CHAPTER III.

'TWAS eight of the clock on the following morning when I was summoned to Mr. Secretary's presence. I found him in a very pleasant chamber looking out upon the bowling green to the west. There is a deep panelling of oak around the walls, and above it they are adorned with hangings of needlework showing scenes of classical story. Here is Horatius very nobly depicted plunging into the river, and Lucrece at work with her maidens. Mr. Cecil sat in a chair of oak, carved at the back in the semblance of vine leaves and grapes. His face is of a great and serene dignity, the forehead deep and of a fine form, the eyes blue and piercing, the upper lip a little compressed upon the fulness of the under, the chin well marked. He weareth a small beard divided into two points. He greeted me,

smiling kindly. Perchance he noted that I did approach him with much diffidence as I presented the letter, with which mine honoured uncle had charged me, for he made as though he would encourage me, though all the while his eyes searched my face as if reading in a book. As I had nought of any sort to hide I lifted my eyes to his frankly while he questioned, first of my good uncle's health and well being, adding—

"He favours me in that he trusts me with his nephew."

To this graciousness I answered very earnestly that I hoped, as far as lay in my poor power, dutifully to fulfil my uncle's orders laid upon me in rendering my most honest service to my master.

"In that I recognise him well," said he, "for he is a worthy friend, in whom I put much confidence."

Then he asked me of my journey and also of the state of the west, putting many and frequent questions of such matters as might naturally come under my notice, as of the culture of the lands around us, and how throve the people; and specially did he ask me whether there were many vagrants, beggars, and idlers, to which I did reply that, indeed, sturdy

rogues were very many and made travelling dangerous. Many did aver that they were starving, yet were they not crippled nor otherwise unmeet for work, and methought that their numbers did in the last few years increase.

"So will it be," quoth he, "while His Grace the King is yet so young: when the hand that holds the reins hath not come to its full strength, and now one, and now another must lay his finger on the bridle, then is the steed badly guided. This is an ill that needs settled measures."

"Would it then be well," asked I, minding me of Master Fowell's purposed severity the day before, "that the powers of branding and punishing had been continued?"

He took not amiss the boldness of my questioning.

"I said not that," he answered. "Strength is not harshness. It needeth that each parish should take order to give work to its own people.* Then only when work is to be had should a man be punished if he doth it not. Sufferedst thou ought in thy coming? Heard I not of some ruffians who would have set upon thy company?"

* Measures for this end were taken by Cecil in Elizabeth's time.

I made answer that it was no great matter; that, indeed, some idle fellows close by the village of Wymbleton had seemed as if they would do us hurt, but finding us too strong had made off. I did somewhat wonder how tidings of this adventure had come to Mr. Cecil, and whether Master Fowell had spoken thereof in pursuance of his will for vengeance. It had surely shown lack of wisdom and kindness so to do, since it were ill to bring the maidens' names into question. I learnt afterwards that the matter came to light through my man Luke. Natheless, I did ever note that in some fashion or other Mr. Cecil learnt all things that did chance.

Even as I was speaking the door opened, and there entered an exceeding noble lady.

"Mildred," quoth my master, "I present to thee this young gentleman, who cometh from my friend Sir Nicholas Sture."

"You are welcome, young sir," she said. "Are you not son to Amice Fountayne? I have seen her when I was a girl, and mind me with gratitude of her gracious pleasant ways with youth. Methinks you have something the trick of her smile."

Here may I say, that while in all the other descriptions given me by Master Fowell I found a foundation of truth amid much malice, as touching Madam Cecil, save as regards good qualities, I found no likeness at all. Instead of revealing others' frailties, in her presence, goodness grew fairer, and, as by a subtle attraction, all that was of worth in any man was drawn forth.

Mr. Cecil then instructed me concerning my future duties, and advised me that I should at certain hours attend his chief secretary, who would have writings for me to make

"Thou wilt have a companion something of thine own years," he said, "in Master Fowell, a shrewd man and one of parts, but headstrong. Guard thyself against this, and for the rest be discreet, and I will be to thee a good master."

Herewith did he dismiss me, and I left his presence much encouraged, and encountered Master Fowell, who challenged me to a game of palms,* the which we played with much spirit. Also he inquired of my interview.

"What like find you Mr. Secretary?"

"Truly, very gracious," quoth I.

* Tennis.

"And for the likeness, how think you of my painting?"

But thereto I gave him no settled answer, saying that in as far as I could judge, Mr. Cecil was a man not to be read in a minute or a day or even a year; whereat he laughed and said, "Right, Socrates."

Then I told him how Mr. Cecil had questioned me concerning the men that set on us on the heath, and I quickly perceived that it was not he who had told the tale, for he was much perturbed, and asked me hastily what I had answered. "What said you of the maidens?"

I replied that I had said nought, seeing that it was most like some strange chance that had brought them there and best not spoken of.

"Now Heaven be thanked, you have some wit," he said; and, shrewdly suspecting that it was he who had led them to this pass, methought he had shown but little himself. Then did I question him as to the damsels, and whether they were not kin to the priest, and what like man was he.

"You would have another portrait," said he, "for our gallery. Good. 'Tis a quaint one. I scarce know whether Sir Martin Astele be most of a sage or an infant. Now, will he astonish you with

depths of learning, yea, glimpses of shrewd wisdom that should have led another man to honour and renown; anon, will he show a very folly of simpleness, letting any rustic cheat him or laugh at him. He shall find you the keynote of this or that statesman's actions, and yet would as like as not detail it to some one who would compass the teller's ruin. He will preach, yea, practise the wildest austerities, yet he is pitiful as a woman over a child's sore finger, or a beggar's meagre meal."

"You, too, do practise something of openness of speech," said I.

"I speak to you freely, 'tis true," he answered. "You will not betray me. I have ever loved to study men, and you are not hard to read. 'Tis a very easy book."

Herein, unless I be strangely deceived in myself, he erred. Yet at least in this he had reason: I am one who would not betray a confidence, and to this man who, being naturally of a hot, outspoken temper, and now in great disturbance of mind and doubt of his course, did yet guard every word that came from his mouth before the most part of the household; to him it was a relief, great as the

letting of blood in fever, to pour out his thoughts unto me.

To my further question as to whether the damsels abode with Sir Martin, he answered—

"The one doth keep his house, that is the little one, the child of his dead sister. The other, Mistress Cecily, is but here for a while to keep her cousin company, for which I opine she must daily devoutly thank Heaven, seeing what her home is."

I questioning further had she parents, he answered—

"A father, of that class of austere men who do yet contrive to have all that they covet in this world. He had a wife lovely as the daughter. Perchance he mourned for her—I cannot say; but having lived till then a life of jollity and mirth, and so enjoyed the pleasures of the world, he next deftly addressed himself to combine its ambitions with the promise of the next life, and has turned saint and ascetic and priest, with a secret inclining towards Rome."

I inquiring how that should advance him in these days, he said—

"Oh, there are ambitions and ambitions. He loveth power, this priest. To what might not a

man aspire who should draw our nation back to those toils from which it hath but half escaped? Cardinal Pole needs emissaries; Dr. Astele hath connection with these foxes. Yea, it doth gratify his gloomy, spying, secret nature to try and draw men into his nets and render others morose like himself."

We had begun our game, but carelessly on both sides; and, thinking rather of the words that passed between us than of our strokes, we had let fall the ball. Now as he spoke he seized it suddenly, striking it with such force that I missing it, it hit against the boundary, and bounding back struck the fool who had perched himself on the low side-wall, and who forthwith began an outcry as if he were being murdered.

"Hold thy peace, tag's end," cried Francis.

Amazed at his heat, which I perceived had been engendered by our talk on Dr. Astele, I exclaimed—

"How hath this man injured you?"

"What mean you?" he said. "He hath injured me not!—Nay; why disguise it? He wrought upon me once, when I was of the age rich in folly, so that I—*I*, forsooth, had dreams of saintly distinction, lying visions of impossible achievements that

had been very ill done if accomplished. I woke and found myself imprisoned in a dungeon of monastic foes in the priory at Merton. Is this no injury?"

"Came you from Merton here?" I asked.

"I obtained a cure at Mortlake," he answered, "and being enabled to do some little services to the Lord Protector, he recommended me here. I am free, but I thank not that wily priest for it, and for all his wile he may be caught. Light hath broken on the slaves; and he may suffer himself through the ill he has wrought."

"Yet," quoth I, "you seem on friendly terms with his daughter."

He laughed, saying, "I visit not the sins of the father on the child. My malice reacheth not thus far."

"Methinks," quoth I, "who strikes a father must hurt a child."

"So thinks your worship," he answered. "Wise youth! Content you, then, and deem my threats but empty air, for of a surety I will not injure *her*. I speak loosely, and wildly, as you may have already noted. Now to our game. I wager you six crowns that I win."

We strained every muscle, the both of us, for

victory. He had more skill than I, and was on the point of success, when, eager to finish quickly, he gave his own hand so shrewd a twist as, for the present time, to disable him, whereat the fool began cutting capers on the top of the wall and crowing.

"Well done, gossip," he said. "Over hit is ill hit! He that boxeth too fiercely cuts his own fist."

"My crowns are thine," said Francis.

"Nay, but," quoth I, "could we finish you had won. We will account it a drawn game, and play it out another time."

The fool scrambled off the wall, and strutting up to us, looked at us both from head to foot.

"Thou sib to Master Fowell," he said, "and forego thy own advantage? Ah, true. 'Tis a wise design of nature by which you are put in natural conjunction as the anvil to the hammer, or the green goose to Michaelmas."

"Or the rod to a fool's back," said Francis.

"Nay, nay," he cried, skipping out of reach of Francis' arm: "That suits as the tonsure suits thee. Get thee a frock, priest; get thee a frock."

CHAPTER IV.

NOW on the same morning Mistress Lettis and Mistress Cecily were holding converse concerning the events of the night before. Sir Martin Astele dwelt in a little house hard by the church, having a neat small garden of herbs and flowers. The damsels sat in a small parlour, which, facing south-east and having a bay window with the centre lattice somewhat narrow, was convenient both for summer and winter. Little sun did penetrate into the back of the room, and in the heat 'twas reasonably cool, while, in the cold weather, one might, close by the window, enjoy the full rays of heat during a large part of the day. Also 'twas well guarded from the winds by the wall around the garden.

The maidens were both working at some womanly

gear, wherein they had much deft skill; and ever and anon one or other of them broke forth into some song which would be taken up by her friend, and both would mingle their voices, Mistress Lettis' voice, which was the sweeter in speaking, being, natheless, not of so fine a compass or so great a power as Mistress Cecily's in song. First Mistress Lettis did begin—

"Ah, my sweet sweeting,
My little pretty sweeting;
My sweeting will I love wherever I go:
She is so proper and pure,
Steadfast, stable and demure—
There is none such, ye may be sure,
As my sweet sweeting.

In all this world, as thinketh me,
Is none so pleasant to my e'e,
That I am glad so oft to see,
As my sweet sweeting.*

When I behold my sweeting sweet,
Her face, her hands, her minion feet,
They seem to me there is none so sweet
As my sweet sweeting.

Above all others praise must I,
And love my little pigsnye,
For none I find so womanly,
As my sweet sweeting.

* The above poem and one or two others are taken from the version in "Early English Poetry" (Canterbury Poets Series).

She is so proper and pure,
Steadfast, stable and demure—
There is none such, ye may be sure,
As my sweet sweeting."

"Thou singest a man's song, Letty, and paintest thyself," quoth Mistress Cecily.

"Sing with me and be blithe, my Cis," quoth Lettis, and began—

"Summer is y-comen in,
Loude sing cuckoo."

Mistress Cecily did join her, but when the song was ended, began a sadder strain—

"A maiden sat sighing
Where daffodils grow,
Her tresses out-vying
Their sunniest glow.
Into the green wood shade
Her constant plaint she made—
Sweet, my love, come to me,
Dear love, I sigh for thee,
Where thou wert wont to be,
Watching alone.

An exile is pining
In infidel chains,
The scoffers deriding
His dolour and pains.
Up to the burning sky
His moan rang drearily—
Love dost thou sigh for me,
Sweetest, ah, think of me,
Where we were wont to be—
We two alone."

As she finished, quoth Mistress Lettis, "Be not I pray thee wrath with me, Cecily. I may not hide from mine uncle that we went on the heath yester-even. It was wrongly done, and against his will, and I may not conceal it from him."

"Thou wouldst betray me, Lettis!" cried Mistress Cecily in great heat.

"Nay, indeed, sweet," answered the other.

"Thou wouldst! Thou didst give me thy word to keep my secret, ere I told thee my love tale. If now thou tellest of my meeting with Master Fowell thou art forsworn," said Mistress Cecily.

"True, and therefore I keep it, thy sad secret," said Mistress Lettis.

"What meanest thou then?" said Mistress Cecily. "Why didst thou fright me?"

"That we went forth yesterday in hope to meet Master Fowell, is thy secret. That I will keep. That I, like a foolish child, did go out late when I had been warned by my uncle that it behoved me to keep at home, seeing that there were many rogues abroad, this is my wrong doing, and this will I tell him," said Mistress Lettis.

"He will ask thee why wentest thou," said Mistress Cecily.

"I will say in girlish folly," answered Mistress Lettis.

"Thou canst not keep it close, if once he knoweth we went forth," said Mistress Cecily.

"Cecily," quoth Mistress Lettis, "my uncle trusts me."

On which that other fell suddenly into a passion of weeping.

"Happy Letty," she said, "thou hast a kind guardian. Alas! for me, that be so rated, and chidden, and chastised that I dread my father's step. Would I had another father!"

Then would Lettis have comforted her, saying, "Sweet Cecily, he is stern of manner, yet he loveth thee. Oft have I seen his eyes rest upon thee, as a miser's on his treasure."

"And," answered Mistress Cecily, "as a miser doth he hoard me up, that I may have no use or good place in the world. 'Tis a strange love that useth me so hardly. I tell thee, Letty, I have craved for a father's love, I, who have known no mother's caresses. How alone am I!"

"Not alone, dear sister mine," quoth Mistress Lettis.

"Thou callest me sister," said Mistress Cecily;

"thou sayest thou lovest me, yet wouldst thou keep me from the only joy of my weary life. Thou hast no pity for me. Little and fair as thou art, thou art strong and hard as a polished pebble."

"Cecily," answered Mistress Lettis, "'tis because I love thee. Coz, what good can come of thy madness?"

"Yes, 'tis indeed a madness, Lettis," she answered. "I saw last night in sleep, a vision of the Virgin Mother, like in feature to the painting above the altar, but not with her calm smile. She was sad as fate, and in her hand she held the child Christ, and He, the infant, frowned on me, and the mother said, 'Turn back while yet there is time, thou that goest on the way to destruction.' I awoke all trembling. Letty, there is no haven for a tempest-tossed soul!"

"Listen, I do conjure thee," did Mistress Lettis pray her. "Listen to the voice, Cecily. If the Holy Mother herself did come to warn thee, canst thou refuse to hearken?"

"'Twas but a dream," she said. "Why should I be wiser or better than the fathers of the Church? His Grace the Archbishop is married."

"His father did not curse him for it," Mistress

Lettis answered. "In thee 'tis a scorning of him who gave thee thy being; more, a murdering of him. Cecily, it would kill thy father."

"Cruel," she began, but then hearing a step without, she so suddenly composed herself that Mistress Lettis afterwards averred it was great wonder to see how quickly her cousin could adjust her countenance and demeanour, and it did make her see very sensibly in how constant a guard and suppression of any sign of feeling Cecily did live at home. As for Mistress Lettis, she had still all the signs of tears on her face when Sir Martin Astele entered.

When the girls had risen and greeted him with due reverence, he with his slender fingers, tapered something as a woman's, yet with much of man's strength in them—he, I say, gently raised his niece's fair face, and smoothing her flaxen hair said softly, "My child, what aileth thee?"

Then kneeling on a little stool before him as he sat down in the armchair, she stroked his gown bordered with black fur, for being of a sedentary habit he did much feel the cold, and looking straight up into his face, which was gentle and simple though grave and dignified, she said—

"Truly, Uncle, my present tears were for a sad tale that I did hear, yet have I something to tell you that will, I fear me, vex you, as it doth grieve me that I did it. Uncle, we foolish maidens went on to the heath, where lieth the little wood, yester-even."

"In despite of my command, Letty?" said Sir Martin.

"Yes, Uncle, and truly we were punished, for there did fly out upon us three ruffian fellows and had surely done us some hurt but that a young gentleman with his attendants coming by on his way to Mr. Secretary's house, rescued us."

At this narration his face changed, and he caught her to him closely, as frighted at the danger she has passed; after which he said gravely—

"Thou art to blame, Lettis. I did more depend on thy discretion, nor deem that a foolish wish could have strength to make thee forget thy duty."

She flushed deep red, feeling it hard that she should bear the blame, who had gone unwillingly, yet she did merely say, "Uncle, I will bear me better henceforward."

Then quoth he, "I trust thee, little one."

At which Mistress Cecily fell again into a great

disorder, and throwing her arms round her cousin as she knelt, exclaimed, "Happy, happy Lettis, that hath so kind a guardian. Would I were in her place!"

"Child," quoth Sir Martin, "speak not thus. Thou hast a father, one of so high a virtue that thou shouldest daily thank God therefor."

"Yea, sooth," said she, in a dull tone, as of a chidden child who must needs assent to what is asked for fear of the rod, whether he will or no.

Then Sir Martin regarded her very earnestly, and speaking very gently said, "Yet do I know that to us of a frailer and weaker nature, at times the sight of that goodness doth something daunt and affright. Perchance I might help thee, if in ought thou knowest not how to order thee to his liking."

She kissed his hand, saying, "Uncle, methinks I might be good, could I but abide with you and Letty. Pray my father that he leave me here."

Then answered he, "Right willingly, for I have ever found thee biddable, and a companion meet for my Lettis, who is, I fear, but a wild child and scarce straightly enough guided. She will look to thee who art older for her model."

"Not to me!" she said. "Yet indeed, sir, she shall learn no harm of me."

"I believe it well," quoth he. "Truly thou too art very dear to me." And therewith he kissed her, and Lettis encircled her with her arm, smiling and saying—

"Never say again thou hast none to love thee."

Then she, weeping again, exclaimed, "Uncle, save me from myself."

Then he asked, "What fearest thou?"

"'Tis all so dead, so cold, so hard at home," she cried, "I would do anything to escape."

"Daughter," said he, "he who runs from his appointed life because it is hard, fares like one who should escape from a beleaguered city into the hands of a foe longing to torture him; outside our path of duty stand the demons of evil."

At this she shivered, and Lettis pressed her closer.

"Rather," did he further say, "brace thee while thou art here to live thy life with courage; but if we may keep thee with thy father's will, trust me my entreaty shall not be wanting. Cheer thee now, Cecily, and weep no more."

His kindness seemed so to hearten, comfort and soften her that Lettis drew bright hopes that she

would conquer her ill-starred love, which to that little maiden did seem a strange and incomprehensible thing; for nothing did she know at that time of the wily god Cupid's power, and much of the sweetness of the happy home, which to her did seem to contain all that woman could need. Therefore she deemed in her innocence, that could Cecily be happy with them this strange fancy would pass away. Nothing either did she know of Master Fowell's governless and headstrong will, or of a man's passion.

CHAPTER V.

IT happened that same day that I had the chance to witness something of the relations between these two, as also to see for the first time Sir Martin Astele, a noteworthy man, though his fame be not much spread abroad. Indeed, though 'tis most like that a man of parts should attain fame, there be some men like unto hidden streams that do fertilize the ground and we know it not.

After the hour of Mr. Cecil's dinner, at the which his secretaries and divers others of his household did dine also, I strolled forth with Master Fowell, he gibing sorely against the stateliness wherewith that repast was ordered. All things were done with great gravity and dignity; the courses were many and well served, first of brawn and mustard, sweet wine served thereto,

potage and capon, then kid roasted and coney, afterwards comfits and cheese scraped, with sugar. All was put on with much ceremony; also there was due interval between the courses, wherein Mr. Secretary conversed of various matters with Master Ambrose, Master Bluet, and Master Bellot. We all ate in silence, therefore to a man of Francis Fowell's gay nature the three hours of our repast grew burdensome. I, also, gladly came forth into the air, nor did it please me ill when Master Fowell proposed that we should wend towards the parsonage.

As we reached the churchyard we saw a group standing near us in which I at once perceived the two maidens whom I already knew; also a very reverent seeming man with a genial face, who was in converse, that did appear most pleasing to both, with Mr. Cecil. Also there were present Master Bluet, Master Ambrose, and Master Bellot. Francis Fowell's face darkened.

"Ill betide them all," he muttered. "May one never be free from the courtly mask?"

He was twisting round and round in his hand a little piece of marjoram, concerning whose

virtues he had been discoursing to me, averring that it had hidden powers to soothe trouble and inspire with happy thoughts.

"Use now your talisman," quoth I.

"In sooth will I," he answered, with a very curious energy. Then, as we came close to the company, he added, "Nay, foolish herb, go, since thou hast not preserved us from mishap," and with that he flung it from him.

Mistress Cecily was standing a little behind and apart from the others, and it fell at her feet, as he saluted her with a grave ceremoniousness. She courtesied with an unsmiling face, yet methought that her lips moved, and it seemed to me that she faintly whispered, "My father is come." No one but I and my companion could have heard the words, nor was I sure of them. Her face altered not from its stately composure, her eyes were cast down and fixed on the sprig of marjoram at her feet. We passed on and saluted the elders, and then remained standing silent and respectful, as was meet.

"You deem well, then, of the present state of this our neighbourhood, worthy Sir Martin?" Mr. Secretary inquired.

"Truly, yes," he answered. "I do find my flock dutiful and well disposed."

"Have you, then, none of evil and tempestuous life?" asked Mr. Secretary.

"There be many," quoth he, with a smile, "of divers infirmities of nature, spiritual as well as bodily. Yet none of whom I dare not hope amendment and better things."

My master smiled. "I do believe you; I do believe you right fully, reverend friend," he said, as he laid his hand upon Sir Martin's shoulder, "for what lout is there so base, what scoundrel so vile that you would not hope for him? But what think you? Ere yet these your sooty imps are washed white, ere your wild beasts are tamed, is there no fear lest they break out into disorder?"

Just then Francis uttered a fierce though low exclamation. On his face was the look with which men look at a foe whom they fear and loathe. Following his eyes, I saw approaching in priestly garb a very tall and stately figure, with high and noble features, a nose hooked and thin, a mouth closed tight as a steel trap, dark piercing eyes, and a forehead of power."

"What hast thou there, my daughter?" he said, as Mistress Cecily courtesied at his passing.

"'Tis a sprig of marjoram, honoured sir," she answered, showing him the leaves which she had been about to arrange in her bosom. "Tis a herb I do much affect."

"Where grows it?" he asked.

"I know not, sir," she said. "Belike some one dropped it here, but 'tis yet sweet and fresh."

"Coz," quoth Mistress Lettis, "I can give thee plenty from the herb at our gate."

"I thank thee, Lettis," returned the other. "Till then I will keep this."

The priest had passed on. Methought it had been better had he been detained a little longer as I heard Mr. Cecil's next words. Sir Martin had been doubtless again expressing his confidence in his people.

"Yet," quoth Mr. Secretary, "it were well, good friend, that you did not put too much trust in this honest folk of yours. Perchance you do not know that your nieces did yestere'en narrowly escape some rudeness, and are in debt to this young gentleman for their safety."

"I have learnt it from themselves," he answered; then turning himself to me, he added, "and I am right glad now to thank you heartily, sir, for your timely aid."

"Why went the maidens out?" asked the priest. His voice was deep and stern, and he surveyed them with keen eyes.

Mistress Lettis flushed of a lovely pink like a sea-shell, but Mistress Cecily stood cold and still.

"Truly," said Sir Martin, "Lettis is used to roam at will among our brakes and on the heath, and loveth, child like, to wander here and there."

"Bless thee for a blind old fool!" murmured Francis.

"I have well advised her," Sir Martin said, further, "that she do it no more, sith there be now many hungry men about, and a fasting man is ill to guide."

"Such disorder should not pass unnoticed," quoth Master Bellot.

Then Mr. Secretary bade me describe the men as fully as might be.

Now I had been minded to say as little of the matter as possible, when Mr. Secretary first questioned me, deeming for the maidens' sake

'twere better no stir was made; but since their part was already known I did desire to aid the discovery and punishment of these evil-doers. Albeit, I judged it not wise to mention their names because I had withheld them at the first, yet I replied that I had not been able to take great note of them, but that the foremost was a burly and stalwart fellow with bristly locks, dressed in a greasy leathern jerkin, and that he had very long arms. Of the others, one was tall with red hair, and the other a small, thin, spare man.

When I made mention of the long arms, a sort of anxiety did appear upon Sir Martin's face. He did say 'twas not unlikely they were men who had strayed from a distance, seeing that of these there had been divers about of late.

The priest, who had been watching Mistress Lettis, said suddenly, "Girl, thou knowest these men."

Quoth Mr. Secretary, "Mistress Lettis, speak, and say what you know."

To whom she in great disorder under all these men's stern eyes answered—

"Oh, sir, only one! I knew but one, and he hath been so grievously afflicted."

"His name?" Mr. Secretary asked.

"Hodge the ploughman, sir," she said. "He was rough and rude; but he could not have meant to harm us. I pray you, sir, pardon him."

"Thou art too forward, maiden," quoth the priest.

"I chide not your kindliness, Mistress Lettis," said Mr. Cecil, "though I may not be swayed by it, my fair child, in this matter which doth concern the due order and quiet of the land."

She did not dare to say more, but pressed close to Sir Martin, and he, encircling her with his arm, said to Mr. Secretary—

"The wife of this man is my child's foster-mother, a faithful woman and good."

"Tut! tut!" quoth Mr. Secretary. "Good friend, that excuseth not him."

"Also," went on Sir Martin, "I do know the man, one whom a little ale doth render mad."

Quoth Master Ambrose, who had been standing apart with a big book under his arm, as his custom was, as though he might imbibe its

virtues by contact, "Ad mores natura recurrit damnatos fixa et mutari nescia." * "The nature of the man doth reveal itself in his drunken fit, which doth take from him fear of consequences and all other useful reasons of restraint. 'Quod in corde sobrii, id in linguâ ebrii.'"

"These lewd fellows do increase," quoth Master Bellot.

"Thou art too fond, my brother," said the priest. "'Tis a false leniency which doth permit ill deeds to pass unpunished."

"Desperate men," said Sir Martin, "flee to acts growing worse and worse. A man marked by his superiors as evil, doth mostly follow that course which they expect of him. Saith not Holy Writ, 'There is mercy with thee, *therefore* shalt thou be feared.'"

Methought the priest liked not these words, but he said nought.

"Therefore," went on Sir Martin to say further, "I would pray Mr. Cecil to hearken to his own gracious dispositions, and in dealing justice to remember pity."

* Human nature ever reverts to its depraved courses, fixed and immutable (J. M.).

"I will inquire into the matter," Mr. Cecil replied. "Master Fowell, see that the fellow is sought for."

With that he turned him to other subjects.

Ere we did part Sir Martin once more thanked me for my poor service, and requested me to visit him at his dwelling, the which I right gladly promised to do. It would have pleasured me, could I have fancied I saw a smile of welcome on the face of either of those fair damsels, but Mistress Cecily's face wore such a proud and lofty composure, that had I not seen her the day before I should have deemed that nothing could move her, and Mistress Lettis had remained much downcast ever since the discovery of Hodge's name.

CHAPTER VI.

MY cousin rapidly recovered from his ill-humour, and undertook with satisfaction to discover Hodge. Had this vile wretch been hanged it had been good riddance, nor can I fail but marvel at Sir Martin's leniency, which must be accounted a weakness in that good man. It did not so much amaze me that the maiden should petition for the ruffian out of love for her foster-mother; a tender heart is a sweet and lovable thing in a woman; nor would I have them too apt at that rigid justice which must govern a man, seeing that these fellows are a kind of wild beasts which must be managed by chains and stripes.

Hodge was mightily perturbed when seized, having counted that no one knew him but Mistress Lettis, and that she in her gentleness

would not discover him to others. Indeed, his wife had been with Mistress Lettis excusing the wretch, and Mistress Lettis had comforted her, saying the thing was not known. Wherefore he was greatly discomforted when he found himself taken and adjudged to be whipped through the village, and be set in the stocks. He ought to have stood amazed with gratitude, seeing that it was a light punishment for attacking a gentlewoman, and one wherein might be read Sir Martin's influence with Mr. Secretary. A man has lost his ears for less.

On the morn when the sentence should be executed, I strolled forth with Master Fowell, and as we went he entertained me with a description of the converse between the doctor and Master Ambrose, which had chanced that morning.

Master Ambrose maintained, and that with many learned citations, that the wise man or philosopher hath as great a power in the conservation of man's health as the doctor, as, saith Seneca, "Quicquid sibi imperavit animus obtinuit." Whereto the doctor objected, in great heat, that the humours of the body must be cured by

rightful treatment, else had the soul but a poor chance; for "know you not," said he, "that the marigold is of great effect against melancholy when rightly infused in a broth, and that the topaz, either carried on the person or taken in a potion, doth impart wisdom."

"I left them arguing still," quoth Francis, "and never a whit the forwarder."

We were come a little apart from the houses of the village. Those who know Wymbleton are aware that it doth lie upon a broad space of high land. Where the flat ground endeth toward the south for the distance of a mile or more, the land doth fall something abruptly, and along the upper edge a way doth pass, made, as is said, of old time by the Romans. Whether this be true or no, certainly it hath been there beyond the memory of living man, and, by reason of its position, is named the Ridgeway. Standing on this road, we saw beneath, toward the southward, wooded country interspersed with pasture land, very meet for flocks. Toward the eastward, on the same height as the Ridgeway, showed in the distance the red tiles of the little church, and thereabout were many great and fine trees, as

oak and cedar, their trunks gnarled and mossy, their roots plainly to be seen with huge thick stems. To the northward, at a short distance, lay one of the common gates, and between it and us a little space of ploughed land, from which came the fresh scent of newly turned earth, a healthy and pleasing odour.

Two larks at the same time had risen from different points, and high up in the blue air they sang, as if to tell the world a tale of mirth. Anear the gate of the common there is something of open space, so that our eyes past on to that small mere wherein I had seen the sunset, whose waters gleamed bright amid the green turf; and the golden gorse, that groweth thick about that part, did light the landscape as with a yellow flame. All about was that joyous sense of spring-tide as it ripens into summer, that maketh the heart leap. A faint tinge of melancholy did mingle with my thoughts, for it is ever (which is surely strange), when the world is bright around, that I do mind me of former pleasant days, whereas adversity doth brace me to think of nought but the present. Also the scent of gorse doth bring to me the memory of my mother,

who would pick for me the blossoms. I seemed to see again our Devon hills, and I a little toddling imp that clutched the brilliant bloom and tore my fingers with the thorns, yet would not let go. She, with mother's pride, cried, as she cut the stem, "See, the brave babe!" and half did laugh and half did weep over my wounded hand. So soft foolishness did this my mood bring on me for all living things, that I was even glad that the conies, which just then did run out, escaped my companion's throw.

"Ill luck!" said he, and would have tried again, but that we heard a sound as of a great roar, whereto we listened, and might discern howls, and yells, and laughter.

"'Tis knave Hodge receiving his deserts," quoth Francis. "He shall be whipped up this road and back again ere he be set in the stocks. They bring him back now."

"But do the people make a tumult, thinkest thou?" asked I.

"Nay, nay," said he. "The wolves, his fellows, do help to rend him. They ever eat their kind. Wilt come? I love to see the beasts tear one another."

I do own that in my then mood I had liever not have gone with him, though I shook off such childish weakness. How wasted had been pity for this man! Yet it was a sorry sight; and while there can be nothing more gracious and inspiriting than to witness a brave contest of well-matched men, there is ever something from which one would gladly turn away in the torture of a wretch who cannot defend himself, however just may be his fate.

On came the rabble; one stout fellow led the cart, another behind did lay his whip on Hodge's bare back with good will, and all round some score of men and boys, running and leaping, did jeer and scoff at him, and fling now mud, now dead cats and dogs.

"Well thrown, well aimed, lads!" cried Francis, as a handful of gravel hit upon the open cut just made by the lash, and Hodge set up a howl of agony.

Besides his bleeding back, a stone had cut his head, and it ran down with blood, and he was bespattered with dirt and foulness.

"See his brave colours," said a rascal boy. "Master Hodge liketh to be fine. I will make him another streak of red."

"So shall he be in pretty trim to kiss the maidens," gibed another.

"Fie on thee!" quoth an elder man. "Would nothing serve thee but Sir Martin's niece?"

"Lay on with a will, fellow," quoth my cousin to the man at the cart-tail, who grinned as he flourished his whip, and answered—

"Aye, aye, master. No man hath a neater touch than I."

Hodge gave a howl like the cry of a wolf, as he turned his bloodshot eyes towards us full of hatred.

It was a gruesome contrast, these bestial men, with the bright morning; and still we ran along with them, Francis ever and anon raising his box of essences to his nose when the wind set towards us from the throng.

When we turned the corner of the road, we came upon Sir Martin Astele's house.

"Now do thy best—whip thy hardest, fellow!" said Francis.

"Aye, aye, master," he answered; and the crowd laughed.

"Dost think the pretty Mistress Cecily will like to see thee?" said one fellow.

Francis turned towards him angrily. "How darest thou name her? Curb thy lewd tongue, fellow," he said, and the man cowered at his tone.

Some foulness did fall on Hodge, and Francis applauded the throw, just as Sir Martin came forth from his house with hasty step.

"Curse thee!" quoth Hodge, lifting his bleeding head, at which the mob did break out in execrations against him, and the whip did fall; and Francis flung a piece of gorse so that its thorns stuck in him, crying—

"Not tamed yet, thou foul-mouthed scoundrel! Leave him not, my men, till he mends his manners."

Sir Martin lifted his voice, which was so clear that it was heard above all the din, and seizing Francis' arm, did say—

"Fie! fie! Is not his punishment enough? You," he said, speaking to us both, "stir not up the people to cruelty. You should rather calm them, being wiser than they."

"Worthy sir," quoth Francis, carelessly, "stint not the poor folk of their mirth."

"Mirth!" said Sir Martin. "Mirth sprung from

sin and sorrow. Truly, such mirth is born of sin, and doth breed sorrow."

"Sorrow, methinks, is very fitting for such a knave as this," quoth Francis. "How say you, good people? Shall this vile wretch dare to lift his eyes towards a gentlewoman, and not suffer for it? A stroke on his hide and a howl of his lips for every moment his eyes dared to light on her."

The rabble once more set up a shout, being eager to continue their pelting; but Sir Martin did cry loudly, "I forbid it," while Hodge whined to him for mercy.

"I forbid it," he said again. "He who would hope for help or comfort from me, let him leave this man. Smart, and Stew, and Dicks, I charge you, each and all, leave this man to his sentence. Think you I will have vengeance added to justice? Is he not of your blood and bone?"

While he was yet speaking, Cecily's father, Dr. Astele, came out of the house, and did advance towards us.

"My brother," said he, "thou dost not well. Hinder not this people when their wrath is in a just cause."

Francis had stood tapping his riding-whip impatiently against his boot. Now he looked up sneering.

"We have shown our zeal," said he; "now let us show our obedience. 'Tis a virtue which should commend itself to priests. Sir Martin, I set the example. We do submit ourselves to the wisdom of your decision. Friends, your pastor doth decree that no more stripes than the legal ones fall on the back of this villain till he be set in the pillory."

Therewith he turned away, making a profound salute to both the fathers, so glad to oppose Dr. Astele that he was ready to stint of his vengeance and gratify Sir Martin, the gentleness of whose nature did breed in him a certain weakness with regard to evil-doers.

Perceiving this, I did marvel that the rabble obeyed his commands, since this sort must be ordered with sternness. Perchance it was because, despite of his gentleness, there was about him a great earnestness which did impress the mind and dispose to the following of his will; insomuch that, as he looked at me with reproach, I felt ashamed before him, and was glad to quit his presence.

"Good Sir Martin is a fool," quoth my cousin afterwards. "'Tis a pity he could not have heard how the fellow Hodge did curse and rail at him as he stood in the pillory."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. CECIL, with all his household, did every day devoutly hear morning and evening prayer said by Master Ambrose, and none might be absent, or they should incur his extremest displeasure, and be severely chid, since he was wont to say—

"The first, the midst, and the last of things to be remembered, is this, to continue yourself in the fear of God by daily service of Him in prayer." *

On the Sunday he did always repair unto the parish church, and the next day being Sunday we betook ourselves early unto the service.

Even unto this day there be many and divers opinions and ways in religion, but truly at that time was the disputing much greater, and the

* A similar remark is at the head of his advice to his ward, the Earl of Rutland.

changes and tumults perplexing and vexatious, for then were many preachings which the Queen hath, in her wisdom, now forbidden; and the people did come together to hear cunning disputations, or hard matters intermixed with much railing on all those things that did mislike the preacher. While one spoke against all manner of things of the Church, and of the Sacrament, and of vestments, and of copes with great anger and fury, and said of King Harry that he was a papist, and that with many opprobrious words *; another would bewail the changes of the time, and cry that all the evil of the State did come because that reverence was no longer shown to holy things, and they said that the strange potents, such as the rain which fell as red as blood, and the earthquakes were for these causes; and they prophesied that the state should presently decline and fall, the which hath not come to pass. For Holy Days, such as the Nativity of our Lady, and the Assumption of our Lady, some observed them and some did not; and for the Feast of St. George the Council commanded that it be not observed as had always been done, the which was very strange,

* *Grey Friar's Chronicle.*

seeing that he is the patron saint of our kingdom, and doth mind us of deeds of arms.

In those days were many different commandments made and changes from King Henry's time to King Edward's, and in King Edward's reign; and then again was fresh order taken by Queen Mary, when she presently came to the Crown; so that by reason of there being so much stir both in use and doctrine, men's minds were in doubt, and each did clamour for his own way.

For myself I trouble my thoughts little with these matters, holding that a man should fear God, do his duty, and hate the Spaniard; that he that is ready to die for his country and his Queen, and doth oppress no man, and say his prayers with sincerity, will be accepted of God through the mercy of Christ, and need fear neither Pope nor devil. Wherefore I do not disturb myself as to what manner of religious service is enjoined by authority for public worship, but conform myself with obedience, and herein I follow the example of my great master, Lord Burleigh, who has said, "I serve God by serving the Queen."

That sweet heart that I do most cherish, minding her of her saintly uncle, his ways and thoughts,

doth love a stately service. Truly it will be pity should the neglecting of music in our services spread as it falleth in some places. Methinks it is a token of indolence both in priest and people, though there be that make they do it from piety. I like it well that all the people join in song throughout the service, and never did I hear a more devout or more excellent music than on this Sunday.

Above all, from the women's side, as we sang the Psalm appointed for the Introit, there rose so ravishing a voice that one could but conceit that it might pass unaltered into the quire of angels in heaven. I soon perceived that this enchanting singing was from Mistress Cecily who, with her face turned towards heaven, seemed lost in an ecstatic contemplation which yet had in it something of sadness, for there was a moisture as of tears in her beautiful eyes.

Francis watched her with an evident admiration, yet showing an annoyance in his face. I could hear his foot tapping impatiently among the rushes, and he muttered between his teeth—

"Accursed superstition! Thy songs shall be turned to another strain soon, fair lily."

Sir Martin made us a discourse such as he deemed meet for Easter, minding us that we had but a minute agone prayed in the Collect that God would give us power to fix our hearts where true joys are to be found, and pourtraying with great vividness the changes which beset us here. "The great," quoth he, "promise themselves happiness in advancement; 'a little step further and I shall sit at ease' they think. So, when they have climbed, and successful fling themselves to rest on the green sward of a satisfied ambition, then falls on them the storm and the pitiless driving rain of a king's displeasure, that perchance without fault of theirs may light upon them to their destruction. Yea, there may come a time when conscience and the king's will clash, and thy very virtue shall prove thy undoing."

"'Tis well old King Hal hears him not," muttered my cousin in my ear, "*he* would fall under a pitiless rain of displeasure."

"Serve we the King of kings," went on Sir Martin, "for He is as a covert from the blast, a hiding-place from the storm. And thou, oh, young man, exulting in thy strength, as a horse that tosses his mane in the wind, thou deemest life a

time of pure joyousness; thou wilt run hither and thither seeking thy pleasure and trowest that no man can say thee nay; remember thy pleasures may fade in thy hand as blossoms plucked; the sweet fruit turn to bitterness in thy mouth. Only above are there pleasures that never cloy. And thou, maiden, sweet and fair, and dainty and young, thou wouldst choose thee a path all soft with grass, a sprinkled mead that thy tender feet be not hurt with the roughness of the way. Bethink thee the fair way may be the way that leadeth to destruction. Turn thee ere the shadows close upon thee, and the cold hail of God's wrath descend on thee while thou hast no shelter." And with many more moving words did he entreat us, while ever darker and darker grew Francis's face, and ever whiter and whiter the maid Cecily.

As it happed, it fell to the turn of Hodge the ploughman to provide the bread and wine for the altar.* I opine that Mistress Lettis had given the monies unto her foster-mother; and this poor woman received the sacrament with very seemly

* Each family in turn, for one Sunday, by the first Prayer-book of King Edward, was bound to provide the bread and wine for the altar, and one member of the family was required to receive the Sacrament.

devotion, but also with much affliction, so that her sobs being very grievous affected Mistress Cecily, whose eyes I could perceive were full of tears, and she like a lily for paleness.

Service done, when we had followed Mr. Secretary and the rest through the south door by which one might pass by a very fair alley unto Mr. Cecil's house, Francis made sign unto me to abide a space in the churchyard, and presently brought me round with him unto the north door as the two maidens issued forth. He would have spoken unto Mistress Cecily, but she went on her way hurriedly, scarce regarding him. Mistress Lettis did greet us in seemly wise, yet neither did she tarry. Francis made a step after them, and then turned back.

"Thou dost hunt in Devon," said he. "When the quarry is wild and the deer doth scent thee too soon, what dost thou do?"

"Faith," returned I, "one must needs make a circuit and come on them warily from a distance."

"Right," said he. Just then Sir Martin came forth, and greeting us kindly he invited us to break our fast with him. Dr. Astele was not with him,

being bidden to other friends, the which did make us wend the more willingly with Sir Martin.

His house hath five rooms—the kitchen, the parlour, and the maidens' room beneath, and two bedrooms above. 'Tis commodious and pleasant. It hath a little court to the front surrounded by a wall of good height, very sunny and meet for fruit and flowers. By the gate is a plot of marjoram. A little paved way doth lead to the door.

"Lettis! Cecily!" called Sir Martin; "serve us with our breakfast. I bring guests."

"With all speed, uncle," Lettis answered from within.

While they made ready we paced up and down the garden walk, and Francis entered into grave converse with Sir Martin, having laid aside the quips and jests with which he was wont to savour his discourse. After a while their talk turned on the King's Grace's health, which was even then but indifferent.

"And if, which God forfend," said Francis, "the King should die, who will then succeed?"

"Surely the Lady Mary," answered Sir Martin.

"You deem her title good?" asked Francis; "yet I have heard that the King hath scruples

of conscience anent such a succession. 'Tis thought, peradventure, he may prefer the Lady Elizabeth."

"It were a grievous sin to do so," said Sir Martin. "The Lady Mary's right is plain, and hath been owned. King Henry did her that justice."

"Yet, honoured sir," pursued my cousin, with an air of much respect; "bethink you, should the Lady Mary succeed, cometh not back the tyranny of the Pope?"

Sir Martin sighed. "To do so great wickedness," said he, "as to hinder the Lady Mary of her right, in the name of God and religion, would surely bring upon us the judgment of God."

"Yet," said Francis, "Stephen Castor did boldly say at the Cross on the last day of August, that there was a great woman within the realm that was a great supporter and maintainer of popery and superstition. Our King and Council, of their wisdom, desire more and more to free us from these vanities. Is not the Bishop of Winchester even now in the Tower for his fond opinions, and Sir Antony Brown in the Fleet for hearing of mass at the Lady Mary's Court? Were the Lady

Mary on the throne, all this godly strictness were undone, and we again in bondage to superstition."

"Is it godly strictness?" quoth Sir Martin, with some heat. "Is it an honour to our Lord that we should, as saith the Scripture, bite and devour one another in His name? There be divers thoughts among divers men, I know it well, as to the manner of our Lord's presence. Let us receive the Holy Sacrament with devout thanksgiving according to His Word, and not pry curiously into the wondrous mystery. But now must each man have his own thoughts on these high matters owned for the only truth; yea, he will curse his neighbour who curseth him again." *

"Have we not abjured the Bishop of Rome?" said Francis. "Nay, have there not been portents and signs even in the air warning us to fight with him?"

In sooth 'twas said at Martyn Abbey, men in harness did appear in the air coming down to the earth and then fading away.†

"The portent hath been reported unto me by credible witnesses," said Sir Martin, "and hath

* It was brought as a reproach against the English Church that various opinions were tolerated in it as to the Holy Communion.

† Merton Abbey, *Grey Friar's Chronicle.*

been interpreted in divers ways. For myself, I would fain believe that the Lord doth show us how the armies of God encamp invisibly about us, even as about Elijah. Trouble and sorrow and dissension do rise on all sides, yet 'the Lord sitteth among the cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet.'"

He said these last words rather to himself than to us, with a light in his eyes as of one who saw visions.

"In struggle and battle there is life," said Francis, and I—for this discourse did weary me—perceived with joy the face of Mistress Lettis, and did thereof advise our host, who, smiling, said—

"I fear me, young sir, we have taxed your patience."

Straightway he led us into the hall, and invited us hospitably to a very well-ordered and pleasing meal; the saffron cakes, in especial, being most excellently made by a marvellous good recipe, pertaining to Mistress Lettis.

While we sat at meat our discourse did turn upon lighter matters, as upon a new fashion of Spanish pin. The maidens questioned Francis,

who first spoke of them, as to what like were these trinkets, whereat he drew forth two of very cunning and excellent make, and requested Sir Martin's leave to present them unto the damsels, who received them with great delight.

"In Spain," quoth Francis, "it hath been told me that the fair ladies use these toys as signs and signals unto their lovers, being easily sent by some old nurse or other convenient messenger."

Of this fashion, though I have spoken with Spaniards, or those who have seen their ways, anent the matter, I could never after hear. When we had eaten and drunk, Sir Martin called for music, and first we performed the madrigal, "Enforced by love and fear," and also that other then newly written, and most harmonious, "In going to my naked bed." I have already spoken of Mistress Cecily's voice. Mistress Lettis had not the great compass or strength of her cousin, but her voice was also tuneful, and blended well with Mistress Cecily's. Sir Martin sang with science and feeling, and Francis and I bore our part with right good will. While we were thus diverting ourselves, we perceived approaching the house a woman in very noisy sorrow, and Mis-

tress Lettis, saying, " 'Tis my nurse," rose hastily, and went forth to her.

"Belike she is come to complain of that vile Hodge," said Mistress Cecily.

"Nay," said Sir Martin. "She loveth him, and would ever fain shield him."

"Then maketh she herself partner of his evil deeds," said I.

And said Francis, "What can this scum know of the sweet passion of love, that harboureth in gentle bosoms?"

Sir Martin shook his head. "Though the flower of love be fair and delicate," quoth he, "the root is tough and sturdy. It can flourish in most soils."

"By your favour, good mine uncle," said Mistress Cecily, for Sir Martin did allow much free speech unto the youthful when with him. "Surely it is not love that the poor woman can feel for this wretch, for love must have in it a quality of admiration. 'Tis when we lift our eyes to that which is grand and beautiful, 'tis then we love. Think you not with me, Master Sture?"

Thereto I assented, saying, "Therefore doth a man by feats of arms and noble deeds strive to

approve himself to his mistress,"—and gladly would I have done much to win the admiration of this lovely woman.

"In part, my child," answered Sir Martin, "thou speakest well. Love ever and only that which is true, and good, and noble, so shalt thou keep thyself in goodness and happiness; so may a woman be a beacon to show the right way, and show men how to be that which she doth praise. Yet when duty doth attach us to some less worthy object, then hath God put within our hearts a power of loving, even such as in the Holy Gospel we find the father had for his prodigal son, though he were in rags and foulness from the swine."

"Reverend sir," said Francis, "you speak as a saint, and of fatherly love. You have not experience, like your holy brother, of the earthly affection towards one woman fairer and dearer than all others; which affection is, I trow, a thing not in a man's own control to measure and weigh, and give or withhold, as he listeth."

"Meseems, Master Fowell," said Sir Martin, "you do disparage that noble passion which you would exalt. I am not of those who scorn the wedded life, and the drawing together of man and

maid: but a love that is stronger than duty, and that can exist apart from God, and in His despite —that clingeth only to outward beauty and grace, and therefore must needs fly should these go—this love is but such a base affection as we share with the very brutes. There is a nobler love, which, knit with bonds of service rendered, and caring not only for the body and mind, but also for the soul of the beloved, takes root for eternity."

"Surely," said I, "saving always service to England and to our Sovereign Lord, the King, a man can have no higher aim than to serve a fair maid."

"The King, and even before the King, the King of kings," said Sir Martin.

"And that service, as 'tis explained by the priesthood," cried Francis, "doth exclude love. Hath the Almighty made men male and female, that they may try and live as the angels."

"Surely not," answered Sir Martin. "Saint Paul saith, 'Love your wives,' and bids that a bishop be the husband of one wife."

"Saith Saint Paul this?" asked Mistress Cecily.

"Certes," said Francis, "and these things hath wicked Rome hidden from us."

"By reason that the apostle hath so said," said Sir Martin further, "I like it not that any be forbid to marry, save such as have taken vows upon them. But for these 'tis surely a sin, since we may not vow unto the Lord and not pay."

Mistress Cecily's cheek, which had flushed, paled again, and Francis would have spoken, and that with vehemence, but Mistress Lettis returning prevented his words by praying her uncle that he would go speak with her foster-mother.

As he went, Mistress Cecily asked why came the good woman, and Mistress Lettis—who wore a frighted, troubled air—answered:

"Hodge hath gone, and nurse Madge doth fear that he hath betaken him to the Egyptians, who have been seen near by."

"Then will he the sooner bring himself to the gallows," said Francis.

"Why troublest thou for this, Letty?" asked Mistress Cecily. "'Tis a good thing he hath gone."

The little maiden, who had tears in her eyes, turned away without answering. She was yet but a child, and with her pretty vexed face and petulant air did resemble a kitten who hath slipped its paws

into shallow water, and comes out having ill liked the wetting; and as one doth feel moved to caress the little animal, so I desired to comfort Mistress Lettis, wherefore I followed her to the window, saying—

"What do you fear, fair mistress?"

"In truth, sir, I scarce know," she answered. "Hodge hath an evil nature. This morn he did wax wroth because of a little worm in his finger,* and that Madge did touch it with the porringer. He beat her sore, and flung out of the house with many threats, and in the space of half an hour came one running to say he had gone to the Egyptians. Think you, sir, he will compass ought against her, or against mine uncle?"

I urged her to fear not, bidding her remember that for one so honoured and beloved as Sir Martin, there would be enough defenders against the malice of one man. He would scarce dare any outrage even against his wife, having been so lately punished, but would hide his head with these Egyptians.

"Yet," said she, "'tis said these men have

* This seems to have been a common affliction. So in Roger Asham's "Toxophilus" we find, "A silie poore worme in his finger may keep him from shoting wel ynough."

curious and wicked arts, by which they may injure others, having made a compact with the evil one."

This truly was a meet cause for fear, yet I minded her that Sir Martin, being a priest, would know how to defend himself against such assaults.

"And he is so good!" she said. "You speak well, Master Sture. Surely nought evil could touch him. I will not fear."

Mistress Cecily had minded to have followed us to the window, but Francis withheld her, speaking with many eager words, to which, perchance, she would not give the heed he wished, for he fell back from her just as Dr. Astele entered the parlour. We rose and greeted him with due respect, the maidens returning to the end of the chamber, and standing very still and quiet, and Sir Martin now returning, we took our leave.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THEN Sir Martin desireth the Lady Mary's reign," quoth Francis, as we wended homewards. "I thought it, but 'tis well to be sure."

I asked him what special interest he found therein, since surely, failing issue of our gracious King, the Lady Mary stood next in succession, and if she did not, Sir Martin could neither make nor mar in the matter.

"'Tis well to know the mind of every man with whom one hath to do," said he. "Hath not thy wisdom taught thee that, 'Master Discretion'?" for so he did oft call me, mocking at me, as being of too grave a habit; yet he sought my society, and I found pleasure in his, since he was at this time of an attractive manner and right cheerful company.

We two, by reason of our youth, and also of our employments, passed many hours together, and grew into a sort of intimacy and friendship, though for his inward thoughts and desires, these he imparted to no man. He seemed to speak with a most outspoken frankness; yet with a mock or a scoff would, as it were, laugh at his own words, and leave the hearer in doubt as to what he did really intend.

He avoided for a time Sir Martin's house, nor do I think that he anywhere encountered Mistress Cecily. Sir Martin, who well perceived that she had a disturbed and sore heart, though he knew not of Francis' love, sought by all means to make her sojourn pleasant and to encourage her that she should bear with patience the austerity of her father. She being used to a very hard and strict discipline, opened as a flower to the sunlight and found in herself power to resist for the time the longings of her heart. Sir Martin did bid the maidens to sit in his presence, and allow them to converse very freely, telling them himself tales of old times and of all such things as were likely to have interest for them.

Mistress Lettis was as blithe as a lark, carolling

songs, chattering, or merry-making. Oftentimes the maidens of their own age, their companions, consorted with them, and Mistress Cecily, though she was at times moody, yet found this life, free from alarms, pleasant with kindness, bright with talk and laugh and song, and filled with simple household duties, so good a thing, that she could not help but freshen and brighten, and she hath said that of all her sad life these were the most peaceful days.

My master took much pleasure in discourse with Sir Martin, and would oft send for him and entertain himself with his learning and simplicity. Oh, what encounter of wits did one hear when Sir Martin and Master Ambrose did converse together! Then would Master Ambrose heap citation on citation till his speech resembled an over-patched jerkin with naught remaining of the original stuff. The doctor also loved to talk with Sir Martin, for that he had knowledge of plants and simples, and would gladly hear and tell concerning these matters.

My regard unto Mr. Secretary increased daily. He was ever courteous and gentle and measured in his speech. It much amazed me that he could

turn him to so great a number of pursuits and do much in each, which I did daily see him perform. I adventured once to comment upon this, whereto he answered, "'Tis not difficult, so you remember to do but one thing at a time and that thoroughly."

Being Secretary of State and of the Privy Council, many great affairs devolved upon him. He concerned himself very largely as to the advance of trade in the kingdom, and wrought that the privileges of the foreigners should be done away so that English merchants should be encouraged. He was chief mover also of the treaty with the King of Sweden. Yet withal he withdrew somewhat from the Court, little liking the extremes to which violent men were then tending, both in religion and as regards divers plots for power. Mr. Cecil judged it better to become necessary with the State and the King by his services and merit, than by cunning devices to procure advancement. He had the noble ambition to be the able minister of a great prince, and to advance the honour of England, but did never snatch at an uncertain supremacy as did those ambitious men whose lives afterwards paid the forfeit of their rashness.

He perceived the honesty of mine intentions, and the truth of my devotion, and took notice of me, giving me some slight personal services for him, and being pleased that I should amuse him with song and lute when he was minded for such recreation; deigning also to inform my ignorance on such matters as did naturally present themselves.

With the beginning of May of this year fell great heats, unnatural for the time, the which was perhaps the cause of the sickness which did ensue. I have oft marked that weather which is not usual for the time of year doth engender diseases. At the beginning we did not fail to rejoice in the pleasantness of the spring. May-day, I do mind me, was as fair a morn as one could ever see, and rising up with the earliest singing of the birds, I betook me, with all the youth of the place, to the meads and woods to bring home the May garlands and to rejoice ourselves after the wont of men and maidens on this day. The whole village was astir: great plenty of old men even, and matrons—yea, all who were not hindered by sickness or infirmity, were abroad. As we went we sang the May song—

"Of every monith in the year
To mirthful May there is no peer,
Her glistering garments are so gay,
Garments so gay, so gay.
You lovers all make merry cheer,
Through gladness of this lusty May,
Through gladness of this lusty May."

Then was there running and laughing and merry jests, and contests who should find the best boughs. Francis and I did make merry with many jests, yet all the while were busied in seeking for one face. Since Mistress Cecily had turned away, as it seemed, from Francis, her beauty did much move me, and I was minded to offer her service. For a while we found her not, but when we reached the little thicket where I had met the maidens on my first coming to Wymbleton, we heard light laughter as of silver bells, and perceived Mistress Lettis beneath a huge and aged hawthorn, springing to reach a bright and lovely bough. As she caught it, but not with a firm enough clasp, it bounded back on high, and a shower of white petals fluttered all about her. Mistress Cecily was there also, and laughing too, and with them other maids and young gallants in attendance. Francis hung back, while I hasted

towards them and proffered my aid, but Mistress Cecily said gaily—

"My cousin will perforce have a spray of her own gathering, though, as you see, she gets it with much pains; but I am not so proud, and will be thankful for aid."

"Fie! fie! Coz," said Mistress Lettis, laughing; "thou didst dare me to get as good a bough as thou, and I, for all my little stature, did take the challenge. Now thou dost cry off, faint heart!"

Cecily laughed too. "I am weary of trying," she said. "I will yield thee the palm for thy daring."

She smiled so graciously upon me as I broke a bough for her, that the blood stirred strangely in my veins, and I exulted that she accepted from me the may.

We moved on through the dewy grass, now plucking flowers, now listening to the nightingale that still poured forth the song he had been singing all the night. Mistress Cecily spake often to one and another, but turned oftenest to me, and Francis kept apart. He came forward but once and proffered his morning greeting, after which he withdrew himself and walked by a rosy damsel, yclept Nancy Lewston.

At last we turned us homeward ladened with our garlands. Francis was something behind us, trolling out a careless song. Just then Mistress Cecily turned her round, and he hasted his steps. He had found a rare purple flower, and would have fain given it unto her. She took it not, but answered she liked not that colour, and with unruffled countenance he dropped behind again.

As we neared the village he called me back to him. "Harry," he said, "step back to the thickets with me. There is vermin to hunt there. Thou canst rejoin thy charmer speedily, but thou art man enough to hie thee back for a thief chase, even if it cost thee five minutes' dalliance."

He further explained that he had seen men of a suspicious aspect in one of the thickets, and took them to be the Egyptians and Hodge with them. "I saw," he said, "the gleam of their coloured scarves. 'Twill be a rare jest to fall upon them."

Now as these fellows go usually in companies, I asked if it were well to call upon Dick Lewston to join us, but Francis had no mind for this.

"We are enough," he said, "for these rascals;" and seeing that he was set upon it, I followed

him to the adventure. It would have ill become a Sture to hold back for fear of disparity of numbers.

We drew our swords lest they should fall upon us at unawares, and advanced through the brushwood, eying closely the thickets and clumps of alder, birch, and hazel. Suddenly, in a little dell, we came upon them. Hodge was lying on the grass, and another with him. Three great fellows were looking out on the other side of the thicket, perhaps spying after any stragglers from the many companies abroad, upon whom these villains might fall. A couple of women were stuffing a coney and a fowl into a bag. There were the remains of a trodden-out fire on the ground, they having camped in that spot for the past night. The men were armed with daggers as well as bludgeons. They wore their coal-black hair long, and were swarthy, dirty, and hideous, but hung with gay-coloured spangled scarves of calico. The women, strapping viragoes, carried long knives, and their patched, torn, and filthy garments showed the great limbs beneath. Though we were but two, and they five in number, yet as we had swords, it seemed most like that they

would run from us. But when Hodge and his fellow sprang up with a yell, the others, turning, perceived us, and they with one accord set upon us.

Hodge and another were on me, and the other three attacked Francis. These bludgeons are a dangerous weapon, though we had the advantage with our swords; also the odds were great. I could not see how it fared with Francis for a while, for I had all my work to hold the two at bay. The Egyptian, a little limber fellow, kept himself out of the reach of my sword, and aimed heavy blows with his staff, which he whirled round his head. At last I reached at him with a shrewd thrust, but had well-nigh paid dearly for it, for with a twist of the arm, which for sure the devil, his patron, had taught him, he brought the bludgeon down, half on the hilt, half on the blade, beating in the guard, and dealing me so sore a hurt on the fingers that the sword dropped from my hand, and the blade snapped in two. Methought all was over with me, but I closed with the fellow with my little hanger in my left hand, and we wrestled. Now Hodge, who had not been very valiant for the fray, came on to aid him and make an end of me, when suddenly

Francis' steel flashed over his head, and he retreated with a howl. Of a truth there are not many swordsmen like Francis. Two men lay dead at his feet, and now he engaged with the third, and kept Hodge off me. My rascal and I were locked together, each with our daggers, and now up rushed the women with their knives out. I had but my left hand, but his left arm was done for, and he was bleeding with a wound in the leg that took much power out of him. A woman, with a yell, leaped on us, and if she could have reached a vital part, I had never seen another day. She struck out with her long knife just as I got my dagger into the fellow. By good hap the padding of my doublet, which was of the Italian fashion, blunted the blow, and my man's hold slackened at that moment, so I knew my thrust had told, and shook myself free. The woman rushed at me again like a fury, and I liked it ill to stab her, for that she was a woman, but Francis' sword came right down on her arm, and she and the other fled howling. There was still one sound man and Hodge, but all the fight was gone out of Hodge, and he was for making off, and when his companion saw that, with a

curse he turned and fled also, leaving the dead and dying on the ground.

There was blood about Francis that was not all shed by his foes; but his eyes shone as one who delights in the fray, and he pursued after them, all along the glade. Just at the end they seemed to make a stand, wherefore I raised me as well as I might, and staggered forward, having a wound in the hip that dizzied me. Their hearts failed, and they fled again, when that luckless beast, Hodge, stumbled and fell. The Egyptian ran on, paying no heed to him. Francis stood over him with his drawn sword, but delayed to strike. Hodge grovelled at his feet, pouring out oaths and entreaties mixed together. Francis neither struck the blow nor let him rise, and as I came near, he was saying, "Thou filthy knave, if I give thee thy vile life, it is mine to use as I will."

"By God!" "by the saints!" "by the devil!" by all things sacred and foul, the fellow protested.

"I know the oath which binds you thieves," quoth Francis, and bending down he uttered low some words which the other repeated in a panic of fear.

Francis touched him with his foot. "Get up, hound!" he said; and Hodge rose, and stood like a beaten cur that would fain run away but dares not, as Francis said, "Stay. Where shall I find thee when I want thee?"

"At our trysting-place, Master, at the 'Three Cranes' at Ketteroke."

"Good. And your signal to friends?"

"The fiend have you."

"A pious and most appropriate salutation. I doubt not that he will. Now, go. Be unfaithful, and you had better be with your master the fiend at once."

Hodge louted low. Never saw I man so scared. Francis laughed as Hodge went off. "I have done a good day's work," said he. "I needed a slave."

"What canst thou want——?" I began, but he interrupted me.

"Thou hast a shrewd cut where that female demon set on thee. I will bind it up, and we must have thee home. She had her reward. Her arm is near chopped off, though thou wast too tender to strike her. Thou hast done me good service, Hal, and I thank thee."

He made shift to bind up my hurt, till we could

get further aid, while I asked again why he had let the fellow go.

"I have drawn his fangs," he said. "He will not dare to show his face, or bite. I tell thee, I wanted a slave. In these times 'tis useful to have power over some of these wandering knaves. Say, 'tis my whim. I love power. But mark thee, Harry: keep silence as to this: I trust thee."

I questioned him again afterwards how he came to know their oath; and he narrated that some time before, it had come to his knowledge that the daughter of the miller—an ill-doing but well-favoured damsel —had been bewitched, as 'twas said, by one of these rogues, and had gone off with them. Having, he said, always had a desire to know something of their doings, he had stalked the tribe as wild animals, watched till the girl was alone, and then bribed her with soft words as well as gold (for he had a wondrous power with women) to reveal him their haunts, and oaths, and words of strange lingo. "Now," said he, in huge delight, "I have a second hold on the band. When I need I can find them, and scare them with knowledge of their ways. They will believe me a magician of mighty power."

But why he should need such scoundrels was a matter that I solved not.

My hurt was something inflamed by this, and I had need of the doctor's aid when we got home. He was indeed a very learned man, and treated me with care; but without question the cure was more painful than the hurt. He made first another incision to give room for the abscess which should ensue, also he applied hot unguents to create matter in the wound.

Spite of all his care, by the morrow the place was worse, and there was greater inflammation all round it. On the second night the pain was so great that I arose in the middle of the night and tore off the bandages and the hot unguents; and after a while I fell into a sweet sleep, and therewith found myself on the morrow singularly revived. I replaced the bandages without owning to Master Henage my weakness, which would have largely displeased him; and after this I more than once eased me of unguents at night, and was not very urgent for the dressing of the wound, feigning myself somewhat better than I was.*

* The same practices of surgeons were common in France. The Vicomte de Tavannes gives a very unfavourable description of them. He says: "Ils faisoient des grands incisions, dilatoient la

Francis laughed hugely when I imparted to him the secret.

"On my faith, thou art brave, Hal!" he said. "I had not dared so much."

He who had no fear of man or demon, or indeed of death, yet did fly to remedies at once if struck by sickness.

This is a strange thing, which I have ofttimes marked. There be men who have no fear in one thing who shall yet fear another which seems no more terrible. A man shall brave the battle and tremble at a pestilence, which is but another mode of death; and a weak woman, who will shudder at a sword, shall tend the sick in infected houses with no thought of fear: the which doth show that man is strangely made, and perhaps proceedeth from some of those humours in the blood which govern men's complexions so that he who is choleric fears not the battle, but cannot abide the chill, creeping fear of sickness that jars upon his bounding blood; while one of a cold, slow temper doth find himself over-stirred, and therefore disordered by the violence of battle.

plage pour donner voye à l'aposthyme avant qu'elle apparust. . . . Ils appliquaient des unguents chauds pour provoquer le pus qui ne peust-être sans une extrême attrition et accidens."

My master deigned to concern himself most graciously anent my wound, though he admonished us that we had acted foolishly in not calling more companions to our aid. "For," quoth he, "the brave man is not he who doth court unnecessary danger, but he who doth affront the peril that he must needs meet in his duty to king and country without quailing. The wise man doth never throw away a chance."

My lady also did send me kindly words; yea, even visited me, which refreshed my spirit.

CHAPTER IX.

MASTER HENAGE was the more ready to leave care of me, seeing that his thoughts were much taken up with Mr. Secretary, who about this time showed signs of feverish indisposition. My Lord Burleigh, as all men know, hath suffered from feeble health all his life, the which doth make most wonderful his great despatch in business and wise conduct of affairs. 'Twas a sickly time, and there was much fever among the poorer sort. Sir Martin was among them day by day, and Dr. Astele also bestirred himself hugely for the sick.

Being ever a lover of fresh air, I got me forth from my chamber in despite of pain, and of dire predictions from Master Henage that thereby I should of a surety inflame my wound. Francis told me jesting that Mistress Cecily and Mistress

Lettis were greatly concerned for me, and dreams of love thronged through my brain. I would fain have walked to Sir Martin's house, but my wound would not yet suffer it; I must needs confine me to the pleached alleys of the garden, where I could repose on the seats in the shade.

I had chosen a spot from which I looked over the churchyard, and through the dark yews I saw a figure which caused my heart to beat quick. 'Twas a tall, shapely maid, with a crown of shining hair. I watched her as she stood gazing towards Mr. Secretary's house, and did muse whether it were possible that she had any thought of me. She could not see me where I sat, for the cedar boughs did intervene. Her kirtle was of blue, her hood flung back for air, so that the light breeze just stirred her tresses. After a while I saw my cousin coming forth from the old yews behind the church. He approached and greeted her; she started, and made as if she would have moved on. He spoke again, and as if half reluctantly she listened, then again would have left him, but turned once more to hearken to his further words. When she answered him her air was agitated, and her discourse perchance

little to his liking, for he kicked the pebbles impatiently with his feet. Just then came another through the churchyard, even the maiden's father. Francis was so placed that he perceived him first, but he took no heed of him, only he raised his head and his moody air left him, as if he would not that his enemy should see his discomfiture.

When Dr. Astele's step approached so near that Cecily was aware it was he, she sprang back several paces like a young startled roe. His mien was wrathful and terrifying as he said some words. Francis saluted with the air of mock respect and courtesy which he often showed unto this man, and with a deep obeisance strode away, and Mistress Cecily followed her father with downcast eyes and a white cheek.

In a short while Francis came to me in the garden with his gayest air. He said nought about Dr. Astele or Mistress Cecily; but as he sat beside me he hummed a merry air, and then broke into a laugh. I asking him why, he said—

"I chased a milk-white doe this morn; then came the stag, and pushing in between, hurt its own offspring, so that it could run no more. 'Tis fallen in the thicket, and will be mine."

Then he began to sing John Skelton's "Song to Isabel":—

"My maiden Isabell
Reflaring rosabell,*
The fragrant camomell,
The ruddy rosary,
The sovereign rosemary,
The pretty strawberry
The columbine, the nept,
The gilly flower well set
The proper violet: . . .
It were a heavenly health
It were an endless wealth
A life for God himself
To hear this nightingale
Among the birdés small
Warbling in the vale!
Dug Dug!
Jug Jug!
Good year! and good luck!
With chuck, chuck!
Chuck, chuck!"

The air was oppressive this day: a kind of mist of heat obscured the sky. My master towards evening suffered much from the fever; and at our supper was discourse concerning his illness, and great disquietude among us all. Madam Cecil left not his chamber.

I had retired early, but could not sleep. Sinister thoughts and forebodings robbed me of

* Odorous sweet rose.

rest, so that I rose up before day to get some news of his state, and went to the ante-chamber where two of his household lay in waiting. As I came thither Madam Cecil herself came forth from the inner chamber to fetch him some cooling drink. She was as white as a woman carven in marble on a tomb, yet even as composed.

"Master Sture," she said, "thy wound is yet green. Thou shouldest be at rest."

I saying I could not rest while my master was so ill, and praying her to tell me how he did, she answered—

"Very ill. My lord is in peril of his life."

I asked her if I could be serviceable in aught, and she said, "In naught—save to pray," and with that did betake her again to the inner chamber.

Master Bellot was in the ante-chamber, and the men Humphrey and Philip. I could not persuade myself to return to my couch, but remained there; the varlets slumbered and nodded, and Master Bellot watched with me.

"I fear me there is little hope. 'Twill be a shrewd loss to the kingdom, even as unto us," said he, but I answered him not. The weight of this great trouble pressed sore upon me, and my

heart was heavy within me. Through the casement, where showed the first faint streaks of dawn, came the sound of a lark's song. I felt a silly anger against the bird for its joyousness. The sound worked otherwise with Madam Cecil. She came forth again out of the inner chamber, and as she heard the sound a brightness came over her.

"He singeth his matins of praise," quoth she. "Methinks 'tis an omen of hope." Then quoth she to Master Bellot, "Mr. Cecil hath spoken. He hath murmured the name of Sir Martin. I would fain that some one should fetch him forthwith. Choose, I pray you, Master Bellot, a discreet messenger, that there may be neither mistake nor delay."

Ere she passed forth again, and as Master Bellot did address himself to one of the grooms to bid the man straightway fetch Sir Martin, forth came Master Henage and bid Humphrey fetch cordials from the doctor's chamber, while he sent Philip on another message at the same time.

"As for Sir Martin, Madam," he said, "'twere well you sent not yet. It is not good that Mr. Cecil should speak or rouse himself."

Madam Cecil sighed, but did nothing further dispute the leech's will; yet so sorely did her countenance fall that I stole forth from the chamber fixed in the intent to hie me forth and bring Sir Martin. He loved my master well, and would grudge not to come and wait if haply he might see him, and if not he might speak words of comfort to Madam Cecil. So wondrously can a distracted mind give strength unto the body that I scarce felt my wound, and whereas yesterday I could walk but a few steps with difficulty, now I sped swiftly across the pleasaunce, and through the churchyard, that being the shortest and least rugged way. 'Twas morn and evil spirits vanish into the darkness at midnight, and though in that uncertain light one chooseth not the neighbourhood of graves, I should have passed a ghost now unnoticing, so much was I concerned to reach my journey's end.

The curate's house is not a stone's throw from the churchyard. I had no need to knock: the chamber window was open, and within I could see Sir Martin already at his prayers, with sighing and groaning as of one in deep distress of mind. Doubtless these prayers were for my master. As

the gate clicked and my foot sounded on the path, he rose and looked out, then came forth hastily to meet me, saying "What tidings?"

Then I unfolded to him quickly how Mr. Cecil lay at the point of death, and that he had spoken Sir Martin's name. Also that Madam Cecil would have had him called, but that Master Henage had said none could see my master, and I prayed that he would not refuse to come with me seeing that my master might ask again for his presence.

"Surely I will come," said he. "I thank you most heartily that you have called me. Lose not yet hope. Master Henage doth ever fear the worst; but methinks this life, so needed for England, shall not yet pass away."

Thus saying he disposed himself to go with me, but noting me closely, he said, "I will go alone. Master Sture, rest you here. This walk hath tried you sorely."

I would have said no, but a strange faintness beset me, and a great pain in my wound, and I sank on the seat in the porch in spite of all my efforts to hold myself upright. "Speed you, Sir Martin," I said, "and I will follow anon."

"Lettis," called Sir Martin, and straightway

she came. Then said he, "Help Master Sture within and look to his hurt. My Lettis hath a deft hand, and will tend you well. Nay, nay! You must needs be guided in this matter and move not homewards yet, or you may cause yourself serious hurt."

With this he left me, and the faintness and pain becoming greater, I was forced to lean heavily on the maid who drew me within doors, and bid me rest on the couch. Having uncovered my wound, she cried, "Oh, sir, how you must have suffered! but I know well what to do." Then she dipped rags in cold water, wherein was mixed a healing distillation of simple herbs, and laid them on the place. Shortly a delicious ease stole over me, and wearied by my night-long watching, and with the effort of my walk, and with the pain, even while I pictured to myself that I would arise in a moment or two, I fell into a heavy sleep.

When I awoke the sun was high. I tried to rise, but there was such a stiffness in the wounded part that I fell back again, and Mistress Lettis coming forward prayed me not to stir, assuring me that if I would rest quiet, and allow her to put on fresh dressings, my hurt would shortly be

greatly amended. I did aver most truly that her medicaments had eased me while the leech's gave me greater pain. At the which she looked hugely pleased, and even clapped her hands, saying, "My good uncle hath taught me. He is wiser than all the leeches. That solemn Master Henage knows not half as much."

Now I did mind me to be up and away, to see how it fared with Mr. Cecil, when we saw Sir Martin returning.

"Be of good cheer," were his first words. "Mr. Cecil hath somewhat mended; and seeing this is the turn of the fever, being the seventh day, I thereby augur for the best, and that it may be God's pleasure to restore him. I have seen him, for his will was so strong to have me to his room, that it would but have harmed him to cross his desire."

"Did you present the bark, uncle?" asked Mistress Lettis.

"Of a surety," said Sir Martin. "Master Henage had it not, and was right glad thereof."

"Now tell me, sir, I pray you," she asked, "had he heard aught of its power? Master Sture, there is a wondrous bark that a Spanish

monk brought to my uncle's monastery, where he was brought up. 'Tis used by the Indians for fever, and hath a right marvellous influence. But here in England 'tis not known, and I feared that Master Henage would scorn it, if he had beforetime heard not of its virtues."

"In sooth, Lettis," said Sir Martin, "I asked him not if he knew the medicine, nor paraded it as a new thing. Simply I demanded whether perchance he might not have this new medicament at hand, and added that therefore I had brought a portion with me, seeing it is rare."

"Oh, wise uncle," said she; "Master Henage likes not to own that there is any medicine whereof he is ignorant."

"Hush, child!" said Sir Martin. "'Tis the harmless vanity of the learned. The master craftsman likes not to be taught by one who is not even of the guild. Right thankful am I that Mr. Cecil hath had the drug, for methinks it is working well. And now, Master Sture, let me not forget that thou too art a patient. Let me see if my little maid hath treated thee aright."

While looking at my hurt Sir Martin did further much pleasure me by saying that he had told

unto Mistress Cecil by what means he had known of Mr. Secretary's desire to see him, and that she had thereto made reply, "I am beholden to him. 'Tis a young gentleman, of a nature as loyal as discreet, and who spares not himself for his lord's service. He hath the gratitude and shall ever have the good offices of Mildred Cecil."

Sir Martin would perforce have me stay with them for that day, promising that by the next I might walk back without further inconvenience, and bidding the maiden prepare for me at once the guest chamber. He did himself so soon as dinner was done return to help watch over Mr. Cecil.

Mistress Cecily did not appear until the midday repast. She looked but sad. Her face was paler than its wont, her eyes a little reddened as with recent tears. She spoke to me very graciously, talking quickly and with a show of gaiety, yet had her mirth no natural sound, and the tears came into her eyes in the very midst of her laughter, when Mistress Lettis showed the ground of her discontent by saying—

"My cousin leaves us to-morrow, which doth much grieve us both."

"Fair mistress, what ill fortune takes you from us?" asked I.

"My father saith that he needs me," she answered, and for a while she spoke no more, but sat with her lips tight pressed.

When Sir Martin had left us, and Mistress Lettis betook herself to the ordering of the guest chamber, Mistress Cecily remained with me, praying me with a most sweet kindness to tell her all that chanced when we encountered the Egyptians. I did rehearse it in order from the very beginning to her. She listened with a pretty eagerness: the breath came quick from her parted lips, and once when I came to that point in my narration where I struggled with my foe and had been slain had not Francis come to my aid, she cried, "Oh, brave heart! Leave not thy story, sir. It thrills my soul." The colour came and went on her soft cheek. Sure there was never another woman so lovely, and I felt stirred with a great devotion towards her. She had of old inclined her thoughts towards Francis, but of late she had avoided him. He was bound by vows and had no right to strive to win her. Therefore I in no wise scrupled to seek to make her forget

him, and this I would have avouched to him at any time.

The day sped quickly in pleasing converse, and when I lay down to rest at night my dreams were at first of a roseate complexion. I saw my master well, and honouring me, and Madam Cecil smiling while I presented unto them my lovely lady, sweet and blooming; but then the scene changed. Of a sudden Francis started up between us with a drawn sword and lunged at me, and I at him, but missed him. Then turned he, and with his caitiff sword struck at Mistress Cecily. I flung myself before her, and it seemed to me her father and her uncle were there also, and Francis striking at us all, and wounding me, and I awoke with the smart, and found that my hurt was paining me, which doubtless had occasioned this dream of violence and fighting; but so dreadful had Francis' face appeared that it was some time before I could put the memory from me.

With the morn all my bright thoughts came back. Spite of the pain in the night my hurt was progressing well, and I deemed myself able to return home. Ere I left, Mistress Cecily again approached me, when, as it chanced, there was no

one else in the chamber. In her hand she had the pin which Francis had given her.

"Master Sture," she said, "my father liketh not these Spanish trinkets. He holdeth gewgaws unseemly for women. I pray you give it back to Master Fowell for me, and tell him what I say. I may not keep it. Say that I prayed you to give it to him again."

Her hand trembled as she put the pin into my fingers, and she showed a wondrous agitation. As I took it, she said further, "Show the thing to none but him. Master Sture, you are kind, and I trust you."

More words seemed to hover on her lips, as if she would fain have made some further disclosure, but if it were so her mind changed, and she said no more. That afternoon, after I had returned home, I saw her on a pillion behind her father, on a stout roan steed, going across the heath towards London. Francis was beside me. "What is that?" cried he. "Mistress Cecily crosseth the heath to-day? Would I had known it sooner!"

I asking wherefore, he answered, "There be many wild fellows about; my service might have been useful."

But methinks this was not his real meaning.

I gave him the trinket, and Mistress Cecily's message, and expected that he would quarrel with me, seeing it could scarce be palatable to him. He showed sign neither of anger nor sorrow.

"A maiden's mood is ever changeful," quoth he. "Said she ought else, Hal?"

"Nought," said I, "only that she might not keep it, and would fain you had it."

"'Twas kindly, was it not, Hal," he said, "to return it to me? What saith the song?—

'If it be yea, I shall be fain:
If it be nay, friends as before,
You shall another man obtain,
And I, mine own, be yours no more.' *

So her father likes not Spanish gewgaws. A wise man, her father, and understands women well."

"Methought," quoth I, "he was something too stern rightly to read a young maid's mind, who needs ever gentle treatment, and whose little fancies and pretty ways show not themselves to the over rigid."

"Oh, sapient boy!" he cried, derisively and rudely; but on this day I was too glad at heart

* Wyat.

to take offence. True, Mistress Cecily was gone away; but for all her loveliness, I was not so deep in love as to pine for an absent mistress. I doubted not to see her again, and planned how I might take a journey to her father's house. In the meantime I had my duties—my service to my master, my converse and games with my fellows, and my hopes of success in the future, so that life did smile sweetly on me.

Each man showed his gladness at Mr. Cecil's recovery, according to his own nature. Master Bluet relaxed into a smile; Master Ambrose did quote Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, and Demosthenes, and I know not what other of less illustrious ancients, Greek and Roman. Master Henage explained to us learnedly the whole nature of fevers, and my lady's face was glad as a May morning.

CHAPTER X.

MR. CECIL mended apace. He showed a particular affection to Sir Martin, often conversing with him on points of religion. For the better knowledge and apprehension of these weighty matters it was his custom sometimes to hold disputations at his house, between those learned in such things; he also himself being well skilled therein. It was at one of these that we did next see Dr. Astele, who was again tarrying with Sir Martin for a short while. Indeed, his life seemed spent in incessant journeying; for what object I know not, but methinks it concerned intrigues as to the power of the Pope in these realms, in the which I know him to have been much mixed in later days. 'Tis certain that the Papists rested their hopes on the Duke of Northumberland before he came to power,

though afterwards they found themselves much deceived.

Besides Sir Martin and Dr. Astele there was present at this conference one Master Thomas, a stern-visaged man, of those convictions that we do now term Puritan, the which opinions I did then hear for the first time, and liked them not. They did discourse as to whether the Mass and the Lord's Supper were all one, both sides citing many learned fathers, also belabouring one another with many opprobrious terms as of heretic on the one side, and idolater on the other. Sir Martin strove to bring them together, affirming that of these things which, by reason of the present infirmity of our mortal nature, we see "in a glass darkly," it is as unreasonable and foolish to seek to give an exact account, as if one should seek to paint the country which he seeth through a mist: "wherefore," said he, "I take the words of the Scripture, but press no man for an interpretation, nor blame him therefor." Dr. Astele and Master Thomas did then both unite to upbraid him as a trifler with truth; but methought Mr. Cecil approved.

Mr. Cecil afterwards made notes of this con-

ference, for it was his habit to commit to writing notes of matters important. He bid me write for him, but when it came to Master Thomas' citations, laughing he took the pen himself, saying, "If Greek doth make heretics, thou art safe." *

When they had sufficiently striven and quarrelled, and come never the nearer to agree, they ceased their talk. Then Francis, very courteously saluting Dr. Astele, asked him whether he tarried long in these parts. Dr. Astele at first answered him shortly, and with much suspiciousness, but in a while their discourse waxed more friendly, and they drew apart, talking in a very earnest fashion on what matters I could not then divine, nor ever knew of a surety, but guessed that Francis, who knew much of His Grace of Northumberland's designs, did flatter Dr. Astele in those hopes he entertained that the Duke would be favourable to Rome; for which same expectation in secret Francis scoffed at him, saying, "His Grace of Northumberland is of that creed that doth promise best for his ambi-

* The study of Greek was condemned on this account. The faculty of theology in Paris asserted before the French Parliament that religion would come to an end if the study of Greek and Hebrew were permitted.

tion, whatever it may be, and they are fools who conceive that he will leave the King's convictions while the King liveth."

My thoughts were much taken up by our forthcoming journey to London. Mr. Cecil was appointed with others to convey the Order of the Garter to the French king, and was graciously pleased to desire Francis and myself to accompany him so far as London, from whence we should bring back news of his welfare to Madam Cecil, also letters and news of the town for his secretary and the household.

'Twas June when we set forth. Madam Cecil commended Mr. Secretary to my dutiful care, seeing that his health was not quite re-established, a charge the most grateful to my heart and honouring that could have been devised. We rode as far as Putney, and there took boat, which is a most excellent way of travelling. In all the world there can be no sight so marvellous and beautiful as our broad and pleasant river when you come towards London. The water was thronged with boats, and ever and anon might you see a gilded barge and banners where some worshipful company did row down; there were

plenty of tiny craft, and the watermen plied for hire with noise and laughing words. Large flocks of swans adorned the stream with their graceful swimming. On the shore the gardens delighted the eye, and houses of the lords and great men, such as I suppose none may compare with them in England.

When we were come to London, we wended to Mr. Cecil's house in the Strand. My master's brow was something heavy with care, especially after a visit which he paid to my Lord of Somerset. Francis accompanied him and returned even gayer than his wont. My Lord of Somerset had received Mr. Secretary with great affection, discoursing with him some time in private. As they came forth, my Lord Somerset said—

"Mr. Secretary, you perceive that I am in sore straits. Shall not I have your countenance and aid? See you not how there be those that would turn the State upside down?"

Then quoth Mr. Secretary, "Your grace may command my poor service in all that is lawful."

"My Lord Duke," said Francis, further, "hath conceived great designs, but I doubt he hath not

courage or skill to bring them to a good issue. He hath bid me see him on the morrow."

"Bid *thee!*" said I. "Standest thou so high in his favour!"

"He bids for all men's favour," said Francis; "but in especial for that of Mr. Cecil's household."

Being led to the Duke the next day, my Lord of Somerset received him in a private apartment and there did much open to him his mind, and that with great disorder and vehemence of manner. "Thou seest," said he, "how I am harried and brought low, and the mind of our gracious King, my sweet nephew, turned against me. But by God's might, I will not suffer it. There be those that are great now that shall bite the dust. He who standeth to me shall receive a large reward."

I queried of Francis if he could divine the Duke's purpose. "He opened himself yet further to me," answered Francis. "My Lord of Northumberland hath driven the poor man nigh distraught, and he is ready to attempt the utmost against him."

Then said I, "These be dangerous words to hear."

"True, most sapient!" quoth he again. "What wouldest thou say should I tell thee he had a plan to kill his great Grace of Northumberland?"

"Mr. Cecil should know of it, if thou hast indeed heard such a thing," said I.

"And why not my Lord of Northumberland?" asked he.

"Nay," said I, "this thing was told thee in trust. Wouldst thou betray him to death? Mr. Cecil hath weight and influence with him, and might turn him from such desperate purposes."

"Thou art a very Solomon for wisdom, and a Nathaniel for guilelessness!" said he. "I did but jest to startle thee. 'Loose words such as my Lord of Somerset's have no value, and are best kept secret altogether. Hold thy peace on the matter." And, as he would give me no assurance whether the thing were true or not, I did hope 'twas but wild words.

As I attended my master at his disrobing, he said to me, in kindly sort, "What thinkest thou of the town, Harry?"

"For the city," did I answer, "'tis wondrous

fair and beautiful, that the eye cannot be wearied of beholding. Also the paved streets with the channel for the slush or refuse that it spread not over the way, are most convenient.

"And for the people, and your entertainment?" he asked; "how dost thou find these?"

"All are most kindly to us, and I like it well," I answered.

"Yet are there pit-falls all around, Harry, as there are holes in the street," said he; "and the air is heavy with storm."

"Sir," quoth I, "his Grace of Somerset's men do use strange, threatening words towards the Duke of Northumberland."

"In sooth," said he, "men oft outdo themselves with threats, though they mean them not. Heed me, young man. Thou hast a true nature, and I would see thee come to honour; but honour, though it be the reward of virtue, is yet gotten with labour and held with danger. In these times, and the while thou tarriest in the city, hear as little as thou canst, and say less than thou hearest. Quarrel with no man, but disclose thyself to none. No man of my household must belong to a party in the State."

I would that I had discovered to him what Francis had told me; but I deemed I had no license to do so, in especial as he had given me the charge to hear as little as I could.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the next day, as it chanced, there was held a great bear-baiting at the Paris garden in Southwark, and Mr. Secretary gave leave unto Francis and to me to attend the same. We found the garden excellently well arranged, with two good rings, one for bulls, and one for bears. On this day were seven bears baited at one time, two of them of very great strength, *videlicet* "Old Harry" and "Black Tom." Also never have I seen dogs of a stouter courage, or a better attack. 'Twas pretty to see how the brave beasts came on, encouraged by the loud shouts of the by-standers backing bear or dog.

In the front rank of the right side of the ring of spectators was a goodly posy of fair dames, their gallants attending on them, also many of the Court and nobles of London. Over on the other side the greasy populace did press and

hustle and shout so that the air was rent with the din. Francis, who knew the place well, found for us a very good standing among some gentlemen of fair degree; and so nigh unto the ladies' gallery that he could well point out and name to me those of note among them before the sport began. Quite near to me, in the forefront of the ladies' gallery, which was but low, sat a dame of very stately presence and richly apparelled, whom Francis named to me as my Lady Pembroke.* Just behind her stood a damsel, fair and tall, and with so great amaze that I could scarce believe my eyes, I knew her for Mistress Cecily.

"What doth she here?" I cried.

"Dr. Astele hath placed her in my Lady Pembroke's household," answered Francis. "The father hath an eye to rank and advancement. He is of the opinion of that 'priest, who did preach how Christ raised Lázarus from death 'because that he was a gentleman given to chivalry for the wealth of his country.'"

I asked him how he knew where Mistress Cecily had been placed.

* Sister of Queen Katharine Parr. The Earl of Pembroke went with Northumberland at this time; afterwards, under Mary, he reproved Bonner for slackness against the Protestants.

"From the word of her father," said he. "Trust me, we are close allies. We love not one another, but it suits our purpose to be at amity. Thou wilt see him presently. We have appointed to meet here, and converse."

Much joyed at my good fortune, I pressed me nearer to the gallery, that I might hold speech with the fair lady. She, coming to the edge of the platform, a little away from Lady Pembroke, bent down and asked me of the welfare of her uncle and cousin. Having satisfied her as to the which, I inquired of her how she liked the sport.

"Poorly," said she; "I am but faint-hearted. I love not to see these good dogs wounded and bleeding. Alack, poor brutes! What have they done to be so injured?"

"Nay, lady," said I, "the mettled beasts love the battle." Indeed, methinks these creatures have all the valour of a gallant soldier. The dogs were straining at their masters' leashes to be upon the bull. He, brave brute, was ready for the combat. Next to the stirring sight of the encounter of brave men, 'tis good to see the stout heart even of a brute.

"Now so gay and full of strength!" she said,

"and presently you shall see them all torn and bleeding! I would I need not look upon it, but my Lady Pembroke likes it well."

"Belike, lady," said Francis, who had come near, and addressed Mistress Cecily, standing ceremoniously uncovered, "you like the jugglers better. There be some on the ground, but methinks they will win no spectators till the more stirring sport be done. Then, if you will go observe them you will find them worth the trouble. There is in them some skill."

Mistress Cecily coloured of a very sweet fresh pink, as though she relished not this address as taunting her for faint-heartedness. Wherefore I said to him angrily, that the sports were but rough for a tender and delicate maiden, and that I marvelled he knew not better what befitted such.

He made me a mocking bow. "I crave thy pardon, most chivalrous," he said. "I had thought the tender womanhood before me, for the most part, was well pleased with the sight. Fair mistress, I go to speak to your father."

Dr. Astele was near us, and as they met I heard Francis say, "The ragged bear wins," and then they turned away deep in converse.

When he was gone Mistress Cecily raised her head, and though ever averting her eyes from the bear and dogs, spoke with a somewhat feverish eagerness, perchance to divert her attention from the scene. After a while, I fear me; I gave but scant attention even to this gracious maiden, so much was I taken by the combat. Black Tom, a bear of a most monstrous size and approved courage, was nighest to us, but a stone's throw off, and against him two dogs of very high mettle with other two of lesser breed and staunchness. One of the first in especial, a brindle of fine quality, bore him rarely well, ever seizing his moment of attack when the creature was occupied with the other dogs, yet caring nothing for wounds, and escaping the bear's hugs with an agility quite admirable. Then did the people cry, "Bravo, bear!" "Bravo, dog!" and with the shouting and the yelping, and the howls and roars and cries of men and beasts, the noise must have reached for miles away.

Just then Francis came back as unmoved as if he had been made of stone.

"Seest thou? Watch how goodly they strive," I cried, but he heeded not; he was behind me

leaning over towards Mistress Cecily. Suddenly a cry rose, shrill above all the din, from some of the women. Black Tom snapped his chain and made a rush from the ring. The dogs were at him; he crushed one, he sent two others, howling, limping back. He broke the brindle's leg; a brave fellow snatched at his chain, but missed, and in another instant the creature was among the people, making straight for us. They scattered, as well they might, for never saw I so savage or so huge a brute. A boy fell; the women shrieked, the men who were baiting the bear at the next stake ran swiftly after Black Tom; then began the beast to climb upon the gallery. God forgive me if I wrong him, but methought I heard Francis say, "By the gospels! a lucky chance!" as he seized Mistress Cecily's hand.

I was about to make for the creature when my Lady Pembroke, turning to Francis, called him by name, and seizing his arm, bade him protect her. At this he lifted Mistress Cecily almost into my arms, and cried, "The crowd presses; make for the right," and with my honoured burden at once I fought through the press. There was danger for women and children to be trampled

to death in the throng, but after a step or two the opener way was to the left, and there Dr. Astele raised his tall form above the rest, and I said to Mistress Cecily it were best to turn towards him. She cried, "Nay, nay, sir, do as he bid," and at that moment a great rush of rude fellows swept between us and the priest. They pushed and hustled us, as if of set purpose, towards the right hand, so that we were fain to give ground, and after a second or two the press grew less. Francis had either taken a different way, or the stream had swept him on a contrary path, for we saw him not. Cecily leaned hard on my arm, her face white as death, but ever drawing me forward as far as her feeble efforts would allow.

"There can be no further danger, mistress," said I. "Fear not. The beast is of a surety again chained ere now."

"I cannot go back," she said. "What must I do? What did he mean?"

I asked her of whom she spoke, but she answered not.

By this we had come upon some juggling fellows, as I judged, of the Egyptian sort, arrayed in strange

tags of finery and tinsel. "Come, see our brave play," they cried.

I bade them stand back, but the foremost of them, a lithe and sinewy fellow with a dark skin, nowise Christian, came near unto us, making a fantastic obeisance.

"Sweet mistress," quoth the audacious rogue, "my art is at your service. What will you know? My imp shall tell you of your past life, or your future fortunes," and with that he showed in his hand a little creature something like a mouse, the which trying, as it seemed, to jump from him, he did catch it again, saying, "Hie, there, stay thou imp; else can I do no marvels."

"Now by the foul fiend that helpeth thee," cried I, "begone, fellow, else will I run thee through."

"My young cock, crow not so loud," said he. "My imp is of mighty power. I were loth to harm thee."

I drew my sword at this insolence, but Mistress Cecily seized my arm. "I pray you, Master Sture," she said, "touch him not. More rests on this than you know of." Then, with a gesture of much dignity, she turned to him saying,

"Sirrah, what token givest thou that thou hast license to speak to me?"

Then quoth he, "There is in us some skill. My imp shall bring you where you would fain be, lovely mistress, and to him you wot of. Hey! Presto, poco, hocus pocus, jump imp, cunning imp, sweet imp bring this lady her maiden and her mantle."

With that, out from under the conjurer's table came forth a damsel, bearing a hood and wimple.

"'Tis my Bridget," said Mistress Cecily. "Master Sture, I am safe now. I pray you leave me."

"No, by the rood," said I. "I leave you not in such following. I attend you, Mistress Cecily, wherever 'tis your will to go."

"By your worship's leave, no, fair sir," said the fellow, grinning. "The lady goes with us, we will have her in safe charge. Mistress, you were best lose no time."

"Mistress Cecily, for Christ's sake, stay," I did entreat her, saying, "Of a surety this is not your maid, but a creation of the evil one."

At this the fellow grinned most vilely and diabolically, and the thing Bridget set up a

screech as if she would have flown at me, and torn out my eyes.

"Be still, Bridget," said Mistress Cecily. "Master Sture, as you are a courteous gentleman, leave me; I shall be safe."

"He *shall* leave you, lady, and that speedily," quoth the scoundrel. "'Tis time you came away."

"Harm him not, I charge thee," said she, still clinging to my arm, so that I could not engage with the fellow. With this the Egyptian gave a low whistle, calling, "Imp, bring the crowd and sweep away the young spark"; and whether indeed the devil did aid him, or whether it were by trick, I know not, but herewith a great shouting band of rude fellows fell between us again, and parted me from the damsel, who left her hold upon my arm, and was in an instant lost to my sight. Hustled so that the breath was well-nigh pressed out of me, I found myself half across the garden. I laid about me with lusty strokes, answered with interest, and I might never have seen another day, when lo! Francis came suddenly to my side from I know not where, crying, "Have a care! Enough! Varlets, disperse!"

Some of them obeyed his words, some shrunk from his blows, and in a little they had all slunk away and left us as strangely as a dream doth pass.

"Well, brave knight," quoth Francis, "where is thy lady?"

I told him what had happened, and did desire his company and aid forthwith to seek out the damsel, lest she should have come to harm, but he restrained me.

"Let her go her own way," he said; "she bid thee leave her." Therewith could I not be content, and at the last, seeing that I would not be stayed, he paced with me the whole circuit of the garden, but we found no trace of Egyptians or conjurers or maidens. Then would I fain have proceeded to her father's house, but Francis minded me that she was in waiting on my Lady Pembroke, and would doubtless request her strange escort to convey her to my Lady Pembroke's mansion.

"Therefore, come home, distrest lover," said he, "and we will even inquire of thy lady's safety at my Lady Pembroke's lodging. Thou art magnanimous, for she hath treated thee but scurvily."

Arrived at my Lady Pembroke's house, we

found that Lady Pembroke herself was safely bestowed there. The porter said he knew not whether all the household were returned, but Francis, going in, brought forth a young gentleman well known unto him, who advised us that all was well.

"Trust Master Fowell for that," quoth he.

"Nay, 'tis my young cousin that squired the damsel," said Francis.

"And lost her?" asked the other, at whose tone I was minded to take offence, but he, seeing my choler, craved my pardon, and we parted friends.

I was well content to hear of the maiden's safety; but her conduct pleased me not, and seemed to me unseemly for a virtuous damsel; so that she stood less high in my regard than heretofore, nor could I understand so strange a behaviour.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morn Mr. Secretary was bidden to the King for his final audience before he set forth on his journey, and was pleased to bid me attend him. We found the King in a summer parlour, hung with needle work, and carpeted with a very fair carpeting, belike from Flanders. His Majesty was of stature moderate, and in vigour slight, with a countenance composed and dignified beyond his years; though withal there was in him a quickness of glance and liveliness of demeanour that did well beseem the brother of our Gloriana. He was in truth a sweet imp of most excellent parts; but the ambition and the evil ways of those around him did much wrong to the country, seeing that the King was not yet of an age rightly to distinguish between his real well-wishers and those who only sought their own wealth and honour; so

that in these troublous times my master did often bear himself as one oppressed with care.

His Majesty did deign to notice me, and to ask me some questions concerning the Devon country, and quoth he—

"Be the people now content to follow godly ways in religion, for methinks there be some among them very stiff-necked, that yet hanker after the idolatry of Rome?"

I replied that in these matters I had but little skill, and could but aver that we were loyal and devoted unto the King's Grace.

Then said he, "I pray you that you wilt attend unto these matters which do concern our eternal welfare. God save our realm from papistry; and for you, young Sir, learn I pray you the truth."

Humbly thanking His Grace for his advice unto me, I said that I would rule me by the teaching of the ministers approved by Mr. Secretary.

"Then," said the King, "you shall do well," and so this passed, and to my contentment, seeing that I deem myself very unmeet for such questions.

Then the King drew my master aside and conversed with him long and earnestly. I, the while, standing in the embrasure of the window, there

came presently towards me a young gallant, who accosting me with civility but some constraint, demanded whether it were I who had had charge of Mistress Cecily Astele after the baiting; and further enquired where I had left the damsel, and why she had not returned unto my Lady Pembroke. I answered, that she was safely housed with the Lady Pembroke's other attendants yestere'en.

"Not so," said he, "she hath not been seen again, and I am bidden to enquire if you saw her bestowed safely at her father's house."

I again averred that she must be at my Lady Pembroke's, seeing that I had well informed myself thereof.

"I have already informed you, sir," said he, "that she is not returned. I pray you have the courtesy to tell me where you left her."

When I said within the bear garden,

"Indeed; and may I enquire why you thus left her?" he asked.

To whom I replied shortly, and in some heat, that she had found her own attendants.

"Then, sir," quoth he, "I bear back the answer to my Lady Pembroke, that you left her in the bear garden, and know nothing of her welfare."

"You may say," I answered, "that being parted by a rush of the crowd, though she had assured me she should be in safety, I diligently enquired, and was told that she had returned home."

"This is strange," quoth he; "I pray you, who informed you of her safety?"

"A gentleman of the household whose name I know not," I replied.

"Stranger still," he rejoined.

At this moment Mr. Secretary did beckon me, and we parted from one another with scant courtesy and looks of anger.

No sooner were we come to our lodgings than I sought out Francis, and demanded of him, if he could tell what all this might mean.

"Not I," quoth he; "but wherefore trouble thyself? The damsel left thee, not thou her. Wherefore shouldest thou play the knight errant?"

"By my life I cannot rest, till I have found her in safety," said I. "Thou art cold-blooded as a serpent! I will first betake me to her father's house."

"Stay, Hal," said he, "I see it were best to put more trust in thee. Give me thy word of honour, that thou wilt not betray the lady's counsel?"

"I will not give it," I answered, "or stay my researches, till thou canst prove to me that she is in honourable charge."

"Thou hast a most generous and knightly care for her," said he, "thou model of a gallant. Methought a lady's secret would have been safe with such a squire of dames."

I bade him prove to me that she was in fitting company, not deceived, but staying of her own will, and did aver that then nothing should draw from me what she would wish concealed.

"I have thy word then. Thou wilt keep it, I wot well. Then Harry know, that Mistress Cecily is my wife."

At this was my amaze and consternation so great that, at the first, I could say no word.

"Well, is she not safe in a husband's care?" said he.

I repeating "Thy wife! Thine!"

"Men's bonds are broken," he said. "The priest of God is no longer the only man whose dearest ties must be unhallowed."

"What danger thou hast woven for thyself and her!" I said. "Ye may sleep in a prison ere many days be past."

"Yes, truly, should her father divine our matter; but this will he not do, unless thou betray us. Cecily, my gentle dove, is safe from her father's falcon grip. She shall never again know a grief or a displeasure."

"Thou art mad," I said. "Thou weavest a coil like this, from which is no issue, and sayest she is safe. Wilt thou keep her hidden all her life?"

"No, sapient Harry, I will not. His Grace of Northumberland will stand our friend and protect us. I have served him well, and he owes me this. But for as much as he needeth for the present the aid of divers men with whom her father hath some influence, so must the matter be kept dark awhile, lest he claim to imprison the thief that has stolen his daughter."

I repeating, "Thou hast served His Grace of Northumberland?"

"Thou hast an echo's trick to-day, Harry," quoth he, "or a scholar's conning his task after his master. Marry, yes; I will repeat it for thee again. His Grace of Northumberland is beholden to me, and wherefore not?"

"Because the Duke of Somerset hath trusted thee," said I.

He frowned, but straightway cleared his brow.

"And the Duke of Somerset hath trusted Mr. Secretary Cecil," said he, "yet His Grace of Northumberland sends him on missions and maketh much of him. What of that? Take not thou the trade and trick of evil suspicions, Harry."

This was true; yet for all that when the Duke fell, and the designs laid to his charge tallied point for point with his hot words to Francis, my heart was heavy within me; and I would I knew that Francis was for nought in the betrayal of the Duke's counsel.

My master being to leave for France on this day, Francis and I were bidden to set forth on the morrow on our return to Wymbleton. I was much busied in service for my lord, but could scarce give right heed to my duty, being so much perturbed in spirit; insomuch that Mr. Cecil bid me collect my wits, and list his instructions with more attention, whereat I was much abashed.

I felt much indignation with Francis, and even some with Mistress Cecily, for that they had used me without scruple for their own designs, and had put me in a strait pass. I could not, nor would not break my word, yet was like to be blamed for the

maid's disappearance, as indeed fell out. I had been even more distraught, had I known that which awaited me when I returned to my lodging to make ready for our departure on the morrow.

As I mounted the stair, there on the threshold stood Dr. Astele, who with stern and angry visage asked of me—

"Young man, where is my daughter?"

I answered that I knew not.

"Lie not so boldly," said he. "I did suspect Master Fowell, but he hath cleared himself frankly and well, accounting for each hour of his time. Tis' thou hast lured away the simple silly maid."

"Proud Priest," cried I, "thou dost abuse thy calling in daring to speak to me thus. I have seen nought of Mistress Cecily since she left me in the bear garden, and the crowd hid her from my sight."

"She left thee?" said he. "It is a monstrous absurdity. She is of a timid and fearsome nature: she would not adventure herself willingly alone in the crowd. Master Sture, I pray you—I, who do not love to crave aught of mortal man—I pray you by the love of God, remember that you speak to her father, and tell me the truth concerning my child."

His tone moved me. I solemnly declared unto him with less of heat, that I spake but truth; and I added that Mistress Cecily saw her own maiden there, and with her some men with whom the wench did seem to have acquaintance. Then would he know what manner of men these were, and when I did say that they were jugglers, with an exceeding bitter cry he threw up his hands, saying then was his daughter of a surety slain, for these men were his foes of old, and he had oft exposed their wickedness, and dealings with the evil one. "Young man," he said, "God pardon you; I cannot. You have left her to perish!"

Now in my heart did I curse Francis, whose evil contrivance had brought this unmerited reproach upon me; and much also did I long to comfort the unhappy father, but my honour tied me down, and when I essayed in any wise to convince him that she was not dead, his suspicions of me did wake again. I gave him as many signals as I could by which to trace the jugglers, and hoped that as he was in such anguish for his daughter, could he but find her he would pardon her for her marriage.

For this afterwards Francis did roundly tax me with folly, averring that the priest would sooner

see her dead than married to him, though, quoth Francis, "it matters not, they will not find the knaves nor Cecily."

For mine own clearment, I insisted to go to Lady Pembroke's lodging and enquire for the young gentleman, who had told me Mistress Cecily was returned. But then what a coil and confusion did meet me. The young gentleman had asked Lady Pembroke's waiting woman, and she had enquired of the matron in whose care were Lady Pembroke's maidens, and she had said her flock was safe, but averred that Mistress Cecily was not in her charge; and each one did lay on other the blame of the mistake, and all did unite to blame me who was most innocent. Also Lady Pembroke must needs see me, and with most haughty air did marvel how I could so leave a damsel unguarded. Truly had it not been that they feared my master, I had like to have been put in prison.

All this did I not dread so much as my return home, and the sorrow that I should there witness of Sir Martin and Mistress Lettis. Remembering the little maid's tender heart, her tears for her nurse's grief, and her love of her cousin, I did presage a very passion of sadness at this, to her,

so great calamity. Sir Martin had heartened me with kind words, and deftly ministered to me, curing my wound, and withal had always put trust in me, and had a kindness towards me, therefore towards him I did feel guilty in hiding the truth more than in hiding it from Dr. Astele, though he was the damsel's father.

Francis excused himself from returning to Wymbleton with me, saying that my Lord of Northumberland had need of him, and that the Duke would satisfy Mr. Cecil. So, with sorry cheer changed from my gay heart when I set out, I arrived again at home.

Madame Cecil sent for me, and asked of her lord's welfare, and of this could I give her cheering tidings, and her sweet smile and thanks were as a bright spot in the gloominess of my sky.

I had not courage to betake me to Sir Martin's house; but it was only on the day after the morrow of my return that, as I issued forth towards the bowling-green at morn, I encountered Sir Martin and Mistress Lettis. They greeted me with much good-will, Sir Martin saying it was in part to seek me they had come, seeing that they hoped I might give them tidings of Mistress Cecily and her wel-

fare, "for," said he, "my child doth long for news of her gossip."

"How doth my coz in the great town, sir, I pray you?" asked Mistress Lettis, "and doth she please herself well in my lady's household?"

My uneasy mien did show them at once that something was amiss. I told them as shortly as I could, and with as many words of hope, how Mistress Cecily with her maid had disappeared, and it was not known where she had hid herself. Then was there wailing and dolence, but never a word of injury or of doubt that I had done my best, save that Mistress Lettis did say, "Oh, sir! how could you let her go?" when I came to say how she had parted from me.

Quoth Sir Martin, while his eyes were filled with tears, noting that the reproach pained me: "Nay, Lettis, my child, I am sure that Master Sture did for her all a man could do, for he is trustworthy and brave."

At this I thanked him, saying I had done my best; and Mistress Lettis, with her piteous sobs choking her voice, said, "Pardon me, I meant not to upbraid."

Then when I had told them all, asking whether she were not of a surety with some friend,

"To whom could she go?" asked Mistress Lettis, and, said Sir Martin—

"Why then does she not tell us of her safety? Of a surety, she had not left either her father or this poor child to mourn her without need."

I could say naught, for my tongue was tied by my promise.

"Master Sture, you feel for us," said Sir Martin. "We thank you as a true friend. My child is in God's care, though our faithless hearts cannot leave her peacefully to Him."

Then he bade Lettis return home with him; but as they would have gone home, came a message from Madame Cecil praying them both to attend her, and she would have me in, that she might hear the tale from my mouth.

"Let us not lose heart," she said. "I will send post to my kinsmen in town, and pray them to use every means to trace these Egyptians, and eke Cecily's maid."

This she did forthwith, but all to no purpose; and after many days they did leave the fruitless search till Mr. Cecil's return from the embassage, with the French Ambassador. He was much moved and discomposed at what had chanced, and blamed

me somewhat severely, that I had said nought to him of the matter before he set forth. It pleased him ill also that Francis had remained in London. My Lord of Northumberland writ, praying that Francis might transfer his service to the Duke, "for which," said he to Mr. Cecil, "I shall be beholden to you;" and Mr. Secretary made courteous reply that his pleasure was his Grace's. Then did he question us all whether this young gentleman were for naught in Mistress Cecily's strange disappearance. Hearing that Master Fowell had cleared him to her father, he demanded of me whether Francis had gone with me to Lady Pembroke's, and said—

"There is more in this than doth appear on the surface. Hast thou reason to think that there was aught between them?"

To this I did reply that in good truth I believed that Francis had loved the maid.

"'Tis he who hath done the thing," said my master. "You have been witless, every one. Master Sture, why didst thou not question him concerning the matter?"

I answered that Francis would not willingly give account of himself to a young fellow such as I;

and that when her father was satisfied I could do no more.

"He broached to thee no design to steal away the maid?" then asked he.

I replied that he had not, but added that Francis was very like to have done the deed, and did venture to ask further, whether Mr. Cecil opined that her father would forgive them, seeing he had mourned the maid as dead.

"That I know not," quoth he; "but the thing must be sought into. A man should marry his daughters early, else will they marry themselves."

Mr. Cecil after this made diligent inquiry; but whether it were that Francis was of so subtle a nature that no man might fathom him, or whether those Egyptians aided him with satanic arts, or whether my Lord of Northumberland helped him with privy aid and countenance, of this I know not; but through some hap or other Mr. Secretary found out nothing at this time. 'Tis true that he was much occupied with State matters and those of high import, first as concerning the proposed marriage of the King unto the French king's daughter, and second as to the Duke of Somerset—as to the which I heard him say unto Madame Cecil—

"I fear he will undo himself, for if he do no rash deed, yet will he so commit himself in words that he shall fall."

"Is there no help?" asked Madame Cecil. "Can he not be better advised?"

"No, sweetheart," said Mr. Cecil. "He cannot govern his passions, either of evil or of good, and falleth from rage to compassion, and from rashness to weakness. For such there is no aid."

CHAPTER XIII.

MISTRESS LETTIS drooped and sorrowed much for her cousin's disappearance, and Sir Martin bore a very sorrowful face. Long hours did he spend in prayer for the maiden's welfare; oftentimes he betook him to the church and did there remain upon his knees, lost to all outward things.

After Mr. Secretary did say unto him that he deemed Francis' hand had been in the matter, Mistress Lettis disclosed unto him all their former practising, and how she had hoped that Cecily had thrust Master Fowell from her heart.

Then was Sir Martin grieved, that she had not told him the thing earlier, while Cecily was with them.

"Youth," said he, "deemeth ever that age cannot judge its matters rightly. 'None,' say the lover and the maiden, 'have ever loved as we: no hearts have

beat so fast, no spirits bounded so high, no longings reached so far.' But thou, child, I thought had more trust in me."

She, weeping, said, "Uncle, never more will I hide ought from you. But oh, though I love him not, I would I knew my poor Cecily were this man's wife, and not dead of some dreadful death."

Sir Martin comforted her, assuring her that he would seek out Francis and pray him to tell them the truth. In his day-book he did write—

"O God, I know not what I should desire for this poor child. I am in a strait, fearing that she hath perished miserably, yet fearing too that if she be married to this man, who hath no care for God or devil, evil will befall her, and her father's curse shall light upon her."

The next time that I visited his house, Sir Martin prayed me very earnestly to tell him, if I could help them to discover what had befallen Mistress Cecily, and if I had reason to believe it likely that she was Master Fowell's wife.

Then I answering, that though he had cleared himself to her father, yet I had noted of old time affection between them, and that in good sooth I deemed it a likely thing that he would try to steal

her away, and adding, "it consists not with mine honour to say more," then cried Mistress Lettis—

"You could tell us something?" to the which I replied not, save by saying that if Francis feared for her life, 'twas strange that he was not more afflicted at her disappearance.

Sir Martin about this time betook himself to London that he might question Francis, who denied flatly all knowledge of the maiden, so that Sir Martin returned yet more perplexed and uncertain.

It was, as is well known, on the 16th of October that the Duke of Somerset with his friends was of a sudden committed to ward, from which he came not forth till his death. My master was at this time in London on the King's service, and being called to give evidence, said merely that the Duke had spoken to him of having enemies and of danger threatened to himself, and that he had told him were he innocent he need have no fear, and if otherwise that he could but pity him.

My Lord of Northumberland was very desirous to have attached Mr. Secretary to himself; but from this my master held aloof, being ill-inclined to this man, and judging him dangerous, as was after abundantly proved. He played fast and loose with

all sides. The Bishops Gardiner and Bonner sent him congratulations for that he had freed them from the tyrant as they called Somerset. But the King's mind being set on reform, and he inclined to go further than any, they soon found the Duke also set on this way.

Dr. Astele had counted securely on his Grace as a friend to Rome, and towards this he had been much led by Francis, who now dared throw off his mask at all points.

It had become my habit very oft to visit Sir Martin and pretty little Mistress Lettis, whose winsome ways reminded me very much of a little sister of mine own who died young. Though she grieved sore for her cousin and playfellow, she could not but be merry at times; tears and laughter each with her bordered close upon the other. Sir Martin loved her with a love most great; and however his brow was clouded and perturbed, either with the difficulties of the time or with private troubles, yet at her coming near to him the shade would pass from his face and his eyes brighten.

I mind me well of one day, for it was the last when Mistress Lettis turned to me with sweet confidence to comfort and cheer her, when the thought

of her lost gossip preyed upon her. I found her in the garden toying with her pet sparrow.*

"Phil! dainty Phil!" she cried. "Come kiss me, Phil!" and the bird fluttered round her and put his lips to hers. "Now fly!" said she, and he flew into her hand. Then at her whistle he circled round and lighted again on her shoulder.

"See, Master Sture!" she said, "see how he danceth to my piping," and therewith she sang—

"Kiss a lip, merry Phip,
Flutter and fly,
Pretty Phil, fear no ill.
Fell cat, nor bird of prey
Near dainty Phip shall stay;
Round my head piping play,
With cheerful cry."

The bird circled round her, hard by her flaxen tresses, and pressed himself against her satin cheek. "He is the truest of loves, as said my Cecily," quoth Mistress Lettis; then with a sudden turn, "Cecily, where art thou? If thou wert not dead surely thou hadst sent me some token."

"Mistress Lettis," I said, "sorrow not. My master, who for his wisdom hath no peer, deems that she is the wife of Francis Fowell. Fair

* The sparrow was a very common pet.

Mistress, I would give much could I tell you good news of her."

"You are good and true, Master Sture," said she. "You valued my Cecily aright."

I tried to turn her thoughts to other things; and shortly Sir Martin joined us, and craved to know what news from town. I told him we heard that the Duke led the King in all things; though some of the lords who at the first most favoured him, were thought to have secret discontent, especially those of the Popish sort.

"He will work no good to the Commonwealth," said Sir Martin. "'Tis a man of base subterfuges and subtle devices. I like it not when such bear sway."

With this we saw a horseman coming towards us; and Mistress Lettis discerned that it was her uncle.

"With what haste he rides," said she. "Never saw I him ride so wildly."

Sir Martin walked towards the little gate, as Dr. Astele flung himself from his steed with a reckless heat that savoured little of his usual gravity. His cloak was all unloosed, his points ill-tied.

"Martin, knewest thou of this practice?" he

cried. "God's death! thou hast another of the viper brood here!"

"Brother," quoth Sir Martin, "what evil hath thus moved thee?"

"I have been tricked," he answered, "befooled that my daughter might be led to damnation. Would God that she had died in her birth, ere ever her eyes opened to the light."

"Uncle," said Mistress Lettis, "what mean you? My Cecily, what of her?"

He seized her roughly by the shoulder. "Speak, girl," he said. "Did she tell thee her wicked will? Did ye devise the thing together?"

Her poor little face flushed with pain at his rough grasp, so that I cried shame on him.

"Hold thy peace! What so! She hath a meet champion. Ye were all in one plot," he said, still holding the maiden, so that in his grip she swayed like a willow wand in the blast.

Sir Martin interposed. "Stephen," he said, "thou failest of thy wonted self-control. Come hither, child." Thereat her uncle loosed her. "Lettis knew of naught that ill beseemed a maiden. Tell us thy trouble. 'Tis ours too."

Dr. Astele's voice was broken with passion, his words disordered as his dress, as he spoke again.

"She is a priest's wanton. The curse of God rest on them both."

I cried out that she was his wife.

Then said he: "His wife forsooth! that means that she hath mocked her God with forms that for him and her are nothing. I tell you all 'tis a worse sin than had she gone to him in frank and open shame. The bad Duke protects them from man, but the judgment of God will find them out."

Mistress Lettis hearkened not to him, but looked at me and said with a great depth of reproach, "You knew it"; and Sir Martin added, "This was ill done."

"They planned the thing together," said Dr. Astele, "and together carried it out. This base young gallant did deliver her to the Egyptians, who hid her, that I might be fooled by that smooth spoken, desperate villain Francis Fowell. But on him and on his mistress the day will come for vengeance. For you, young man, I warn you, I go now to Sir William Cecil. He will not deny me justice against you."

I answered that before my master I would defend myself. I cared not to answer Dr. Astele; but to Sir Martin and Mistress Lettis I did protest that

I had no hand in the doing of the deed, nor knew of it till it was done.

She said, still with that look in her eyes: "You told us nought. You let us mourn her death, and told us not. You said no word, else might mine uncle Martin have found her."

Something I murmured concerning my promise that bound me.

"How could you bind yourself to such baseness?" she asked.

"Child," quoth Sir Martin, "thus speak the gallants of this world. Truth to their comrade licenceth falsehood to maidens and old men."

"Oh, false!" she said. "I thought you true. Uncle, I pray you suffer me to go within, lest I say something that doth not beseem a woman."

I would fain have tried yet to justify myself to her and to Sir Martin, but I scorned to do so before Dr. Astele.

Said Sir Martin, "I pray you leave us to our sorrow"; and quoth Dr. Astele, "Go, evil youth."

Taking no heed of him, I turned and bowed to Sir Martin, saying, "You have misjudged me," and gat me out of the gate, and so home.

That afternoon the storm burst upon me. I was

walking in the bowling-green companied by young Master Thomas and the fool. The boy in his precise and prim manner was trying conclusions with the fool, much satisfied with his own feeble wit. By and by forth come a little toddling maid, the eldest born of Lady Cecil's children, holding out tiny hands to woo me to take her, which done, she crowed and laughed for joy as I tossed her in the air, and called me in her infant prattle, "Good Master 'Ture. Kind Hal! Higher, higher!" till struggling in her glee, she tumbled from my arm, and bruised her little head in falling. I caught her up, but the naughty babe struck at me in a sudden anger. "Bad, bad," she said; "hurt 'ittle 'Isbeth." *

The fool laughed and moralised, as is their wont. "Please a maiden till she bring herself to pain, and thou shall be well rewarded with a nip and a harsh word," quoth he. "Master Sture, I perceive it clearly, thou shalt receive in this world the kicks of those that ride thee for their use."

Said Master Thomas, gravely, "'Tis an untoward infant. Canst thou not bear so little a pain, babe?"

* Elizabeth, not the daughter who married Lord Wentworth, who was born in 1564, but one of several elder children who died young.

"An it had been a tennis ball now it were another matter," quoth the jibing fool, recalling some memory at which the boy reddened angrily.

The little maid had repented her for her anger. "Wouldst thou hurt thy Hal?" I asked, and she began to stroke my cheek.

The while I fondled her, came a message that my lord would speak with me. He was in his privy chamber sitting in that carven chair wherein I had first seen him when I came to Wymbleton, and wrapped in his black satin gown furred with martin. His aspect was stern and severe. Dr. Astele stood before him, having composed and straightened his dress, and sobered his manner into a gloomy fixedness of wrath. Near him, on a little settle, sat Sir Martin, his face of a grey paleness.

"What knowest thou of this business? Speak, and speak truly," quoth Sir William.

When I had told him, he demanded further wherefore I had not made known where she was and with whom. I, answering that Francis had bound me by my honour to disclose naught, and that I had no right to tell the damsel's secret without her consent, he said, "There is no honour in letting a woman destroy herself for a punctilio."

Quoth Dr. Astele: "Believe him not. His tale hath neither sense nor coherency. He hath been accomplice in the matter. Sir William, I pray you for a just punishment."

Sir William then further questioned me as to what had chanced in the bear garden. Having heard all, he did roundly censure me for folly and perversity, but did accept my word that I had in nothing abetted Francis: "Else," said he, "I had not shielded you from a prison." Then he bid me go, saying: "What I may do in the matter concerning you, I will advise me by and by."

My master then earnestly worked with her father to persuade him to proceed no more in anger against Mistress Cecily, seeing that such marriages were now good in law; also the Duke of Northumberland standing friend to the young couple, he could in no wise reach them, and might damage himself. Sir Martin added his word for peace; but to neither of them would Dr. Astele listen.

"Man may deny me justice," said he, "but I will not cease to demand it; still less will I countenance this sin by forgiving it."

For Mistress Cecily's sake I was glad that the Duke's protection was like to save them from any

ill-consequences of their doings, yet 'twas hard indeed that Francis should escape, and I bear the punishment. I dreaded above all things the loss of my master's favour; also it stung and hurt me deeply that Mistress Lettis did deem me false—a thing abhorrent to me.

The motley fool came and sat himself with twisted legs beside me, toward the afternoon. I was minded to send him off in harsh sort, for I had no heart for his folly, but he would not go. "So," said he, "the fair lady Cecily hath done her scratching, and now would fain give you a stroke on the cheek."

At this I bid him say what he meant.

"A letter, my master," said he, chuckling: "not to her father—she is not simple enough for that. As well might you expect a stone image of the Virgin to be soft to the touch, as that reverent father to show a father's pity. The poor fool could have told him where he should not trust, aye, and told you too."

"To the matter, fool," said I.

"Lo you now, what haste is here!" he said. "I made a pretty dance and song to fit your case yesterday. Will you hear it?"

"I am like to make you sing a different tune if you answer not," cried I.

"Answer what?" asked the mocking knave.

"What letter didst thou speak of, sirrah?" said I. "But I am as witless as thou to ask thee What canst thou know?"

He sidled up to me, pushing his cap awry and with a consequential air. "A letter, oh, yes, a letter," he said, "a letter unto the good uncle, who is simple like you, and doth not know when a fool ought to be whipped; and she prayeth his pardon with much sorrow, and she weepeth over the paper methinks; and she wringeth her pretty hands —so many 'ohs' and 'ahs' be there and 'pity me'; and sighs; and eke how good is her husband is writ very big, and also that Master Sture had no knowledge of their enterprise, and is to be held blameless."

"How canst thou know this?" I asked.

He cocked his head on one side with the gesture of one listening behind a curtain; and I chid him soundly and walked off, leaving him singing. The teasing varlet must needs follow me, dancing and singing all the time—

"Harry would pluck him a pear from the tree,
With a hey, and a ho, but friends cost dear;
Cometh his gossip right merrily:
Can sorrow be far with a false friend near?

Harry has plucked his ripe red prize,
With a hey, and a ho, but friends cost dear;
Cometh a wasp through the sunny skies,
Can sorrow be far with a false friend near?

Harry has dropped the fruit below,
With a hey, and a ho, but friends cost dear;
Luscious the pear as his friend doth know,
Can sorrow be far with a false friend near?

The gossip eats fast as fast can be,
With a hey, and a ho, such friends cost dear;
Harry was stung, but the friend went free,
Can sorrow be far, with a false friend near?"

His news turned out true; but methinks, despite the letter, had it not been for my Lady Cecil, I had not escaped a touch of ward, or which were worse, had been sent from my lord's service. She was one of those rare beings, whose favours fail not when they are most needed; and who do never forget a deed of service—yea, who remember it most clearly when the doer is in most trouble. Perchance, also, it counted for something in my lord's clemency that the little maid Elizabeth loved me, and oft had been in my arms, when her father called her, and if this were so, I do not deem such a reason unbefitting the greatness of my master.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISON had scarce been more dreary than the time which followed. Gladly would I have been in ward for a year could I have come forth afterwards to warm me in the sun of Sir William Cecil's favour. When the master frowns the servants sting; and I, who had seemed but a little while ago something of a favourite, or at least well thought of by all the household, found myself in disgrace with all. Only the poor fool, mocking at himself for his own fidelity, would seek me out and divert my melancholy with his pranks, the which cost me some rude jests from some of the young fellows, as "that I was in fitting company." They desisted from these when I had broken the heads of one or two, though I was chided for disorderly brawling. The house was the duller for lack of Francis, who had been ever my companion, and who knew well how to make the hours pass lightly with song or

play or jest. Worse than this, I could no longer find kind companions, and gracious talk, wise and merry by turns, with Sir Martin and Mistress Lettis. She passed me if we ever met, with averted eyes and a bare cold courtesy; and Sir Martin made me see clearly that he desired not my company in his house. In his day-book is this entry:—

"Master Sture hath disappointed me. I had thought him worthy. He is of a kindly temper, and I believe would fain do well; but he is easily led by those who are of a bad nature."

Such mistaken judgments may even a wise man form! for of a surety I am not easily swayed.

Mistress Lettis seemed to renew all her first grief for her cousin, and he writes—

"God save my child from further woe. I will watch my dove narrowly, and none shall come to my dove-cot that might prey upon it."

The winter passed drearily away. In the early part of the next year the King made a progress through his dominions, Sir William Cecil being with him. 'Twas said that the Duke did desire to divert him from thoughts of his uncle, and that the King did grieve for him in secret. Sir William was also at this time much away at his house of Burleigh,

which came to him on the death of his father. For this and for the gardens at Wymbleton he was ever seeking for rare plants, and cultivated his flowers with great diligence. He took me not with him on any of his journeys; but I remained dull and moped and with but little employment.

News reached us that Francis was high in my Lord of Northumberland's favour, and that Cecily's beauty was rarely esteemed. Once in Sir William's absence he came to Wymbleton, and visited the Alansons and Walters for some intrigues of the Duke, who did desire to purvey him friends in the country, but was too overbearing to know the right way.

Francis brought costly presents from his wife to Mistress Lettis; but these her uncle would in no wise allow her to receive, the which angered him bitterly, though he laughed and scoffed thereat. He held his head high, was dressed most bravely in gay apparel, and hoped for a future that should satisfy all his ambition.

"Men that began far lower than I, have ruled the realm, and that not so long since," quoth he. "Even if this poor fragile child, the King, do fail, there be other and noble plans behind. . . . What?

Thou wilt hear none of my plans, Harry? Leave this dull pedant, your master, who requites you so ill for your silly devotion. Hast no ambition, man? Launch out into the broad sea of enterprise. He who hugs the shore will never find new worlds."

"I like not your new worlds," I answered, "they be old in craft, and ill designs. I may thank you, if Sir William Cecil is displeased with me."

"Poor youth!" he said, in the old scoffing tone. "The sly fox ought to have more sympathy with a little harmless deception. He got his own wife by stealth, and in defiance of his kin; but I trow in the society of this perfect, stately, high-bred dame he hath forgotten those follies and poor Mary Cheke: * and 'tis ever the most crafty who least like to be tricked. Who cares to be beaten with his own weapons?"

"Thou dost revile one whom thou art not worthy to name," cried I as we parted.

I care not to write of that year. 'Tis ill to remember, as 'twas ill to suffer. Days of enterprise, of sore danger, even perchance a cutting sorrow, a man may oft be glad to hold in remembrance. The

* Cecil seems to have been removed from college on her account.

danger is pleasant to recall when once 'tis past; the enterprise, however desperate, however futile, hath its excitement, and stirs the blood as in thought we pass through it again. The sorrow may have, there-with mingled, recollections of tender moments of sweet love and high desires, and when well borne it bringeth out the strength and courage that lieth in a man;—but days of weary inaction and inglorious disgrace, these fret the breast in passing, and in memory become a teasing sting and a numbing ache.

With this year the King's health declined. The Duke of Northumberland kept it close; and suspicion of foul play rested on him. Men said His Grace the King had been poisoned; but of a surety that haughty and ambitious man had too great a wit and worldly wisdom to compass the King's death. While King Edward lived the Duke of Northumberland would rule all; when the King departed he must seek some other means to retain his power. Thereto had he planned a crafty device, seeing that His Majesty had but short time to live; yet could he not bring it so swiftly to a head, but that the King's death ruined his plans. Could he have had the time to bring the succession before Parliament, and had obtained their assent to his device, he had had far

better chance of establishing the Lady Jane, though even then 'tis like the people had risen against the hated ragged bear.

My master had no stomach for this scheme. One day I heard him say unto my Lady Cecil—

"Accursed be this life of a poor courtier. There be rocks on all sides, and the steerage is hard indeed."

"Yet, William, thy wisdom will bear thee through: I know it well," she said.

"Pray God it may, sweet. I would I had scope to work good for my country, or else were free of the court life."

Noting my presence after he had spoken he hastily bid me depart. I noted that he after this withdrew himself as much as might be from the Court, pretexing, as he could with truth, the state of his health, which was very frail.*

In May of the year of grace 1553, being the seventh year of King Edward, the Duke of Northumberland writ to Sir William that the King was mending fast, the which was but a fable, and one to which Sir William gave little credit. He, being of the Council, was shortly after summoned

* Sick of the Duke's device, says Strype.

to town, and, as has been declared by his faithful domestic, did append his name to the device naming the Lady Jane to the succession, doing it nathless as a witness of that which the King and Council had determined.

I had been bidden to attend Sir William to Greenwich, where the King lay, seeing that Sir William judged it well to have a large following at this time. Thus it chanced that I was often in waiting in the antechamber of the King's room, though never with any service of trust or distinction. It was a hard matter to show a brave countenance, but I bore me as gallantly as I could, above all when I encountered Francis, who would glance at me with a scornful compassion that filled me with rage.

"Thou art a very hound for faithfulness," he said, "though thy master show thee cold countenance."

"Take heed thy bear give thee not a rude gripe," I answered, "or fall not to the dogs himself some day."

"See; I like thee, Hal," he said; "thou art an innocent boy. Cast in thy lot with mine. I tell thee there be fair days coming when this young weakling has passed away."

I would not listen to him, but turned me away

and stood by the window. Now as it happed there hung there a shield of silver well burnished, so that a man might see reflected even as in a mirror the likeness of ary one who stood before it. On this was I looking, admiring the cunning chasing of the edge, being screened from sight the while by a curtain that hung between me and the entrance to the chamber where the Duke and my master were at that time in conference. Just then there came forth from the inner room one of Francis' companions, and seeing me not, cried—

"By my troth I was fain to come forth, else must I have laughed before the Duke's face. The old fox is wily; but the bear is wiler. All is over, yet we have wrought with him till he verily believeth the King will live. . . ."

I started, but ere I could say aught, I saw in the shield Francis frown angrily, and put his finger to his lip with a thrust of his hand over the shoulder towards me; and that other, with a promptitude that the fiend must have taught him, went on as if he had only broken his speech with a laugh:

"The King," said he, "will live as jolly a life as old King Hal, if he be not tutored and governed in his youth."

So well did he play his part, that had I not seen their faces, the which they did little suspect, I had been deluded. By good hap my countenance being hidden from them, I had time to compose it, and then, turning, asked—

"I pray you, sir, whom call you 'old fox'?"

"My Lord of Arundel," quoth he readily. "In good sooth he would lead His Grace the King into courses ill suited for his health, were he not let and hindered by the good Duke."

"Is His Majesty, then," asked I, "so far recovered that he may think of jollity?"

"Heaven be praised, he is," answered the hypocrite.

I forebore to charge him with his deceit, bearing me warily, and hugely pleased to deceive those who would fain have deceived me.

So soon as my lord came forth, I craved permission to speak with him, and then related unto him all that I had heard; to the which he listened with a more gracious air than he had shown me during the past year, yet with a troubled face. Then after pacing awhile the chamber as one in deep thought—

"I thank thee," he said. "Methinks all is indeed over with the King. This will I find means to

learn." Then regarding me closely, he said, "Thou hast failed once in duty; yet I think thee true at heart."

"Sir," said I, "it would be unto me the most gracious favour if you would give me the chance of proving my loyal service."

"Go not abroad," then said he; "I may need thee."

That day therefore I waited, and the next till noon, when I was bidden to Sir William's presence.

"Master Sture," he said; "in these days it is hard to know whom to trust. I have advised me to send thee on a great service, for of late I have watched thee well, and have seen in thee a readiness to make amends for past heedlessnesses. Now I trust thee with a matter that importeth much to the kingdom. The King is dead."

I uttered a cry, but he put up his hand impatiently to silence me, saying—

"Speak word of it to none. Take horse and hie thee forthwith to Hatfield, where lieth the Princess Elizabeth. She has been summoned to see her brother by reason of his illness. Bid her from me that she come not, as she valueth her safety. There be evil designs afloat. For thy life tell no

man where thou goest or why. Understandest thou?"

I answered yea, but asked if I should have no token or letter to the Princess.

"Safer not," said he; "but thou mayest say that whatsoe'er betide, I am her true servant. Hie thee with speed; tarry for naught on the way. Take Doveril, he is the swiftest of my steeds; and this before all observe, be speedy and be secret."

CHAPTER XV.

THE afternoon was drawing on, and the heat of the day beginning to pass, as I got me out of the town as quietly as I might. My man Luke that was yet in my service, and a trusty fellow enough, made ready the steed, and was very desirous to have come with me, but I thought it wiser to have no followers and that no one should know the way that I did wend. Coming out of the town and passing free at the gate by favour of order from Sir William Cecil, though I marked with wonder that strict note was taken to see who went forth, and that some were turned back, I hied me on upon the road northward. Coming shortly to a pleasant piece of green turf I urged my good steed forward. Just then I heard the clattering of horse hoofs behind me, as of one coming at a wild and heedless pace. Turning me backward, at a glance I knew the rider's mien and air. Naught could have

happened more untoward than this encounter, nor no mortal have been more dangerous to my enterprise than Francis, who came swiftly after me.

"Well met, good boy," quoth he. "Whither away?"

"On my own business," said I, testily, for not a subterfuge would come into my head.

"Thy master lets thee forth in this easy fashion?" said he. "Methinks of one time 'twas his errands we did, not our own."

"And if I choose to take my own way, what is that to thee?" said I.

"Nay, Hal," he answered, "for the interest I bear thee I must needs be sorely grieved to see thee in such danger of thy master's disfavour:—and how didst thou pass the gates?"

"May I not have friends as well as another?" said I. "How camest thou out?"

"I am in His Grace of Northumberland's trust. Foolish boy, why play at these petty disguises? Did they not tell me at the gate that thou hadst Mr. Secretary's order?"

"Who bade thee spy upon me?" asked I.

"Wherefore so hot, good friend? The Duke willeth to know all that go forth, and why? With

the order of Mr. Secretary, his dearly loved ally, all is well. Now seest thou, Hal, how much better truth availeth than falsehood?"

I had willingly struck him, but asked instead whither he went.

"Just to company thee a little, beloved Coz," said he.

I glanced at his horse. 'Twas of inferior speed and metal to mine; I might find means to give him the slip.

"If thou comest in peaceable friendship, have with you," therefore said I, and on we fared—he with prank and jest, I revolving how I might steal away.

By this the long evening shadows gan to fall, and we entered a little hamlet.

"My nest is here," said Francis, "where my dove broodeth. I have brought her away from the Court. Alight thee and sup, and go on thy mysterious way to-morrow."

Then I said I might not tarry, but would bid him farewell.

"Not so, discourteous youth," said he. "Wilt thou not greet my fair wife?"

"Gladly, on my return," said I. "I did not let

thee in thy loves; yea, I kept thy secret. Be as fair to me."

He laughed aloud. "Oh, most feeble dissembler! Thinkest thou I can credit that Mr. Secretary hath let thee forth with a pass on thine own love adventures. See here, Hal, tell me thy business, for I must know it."

"Thinkest thou I shall account to thee for what I do?" said I.

He laid his hand on my rein. I bade him free me, and touched my sword.

"Fool," said he; "thou hast brought it on thyself," and therewith with no more warning he dealt me such a blow that I fell from my saddle and knew no more for that while. . . .

When I again became conscious, the first thing whereof I was sensible was a stinging pain in my right shoulder. I found myself on a couch in a daintily ordered chamber, and a voice that seemed familiar to me said: "Lay him here, Francis. 'Tis here that I can best tend him."

"He hath a shrewd hurt, but he will weather it," answered Francis. "Do thy best for him, Cis; I would not have him miscarry. Suffer him not to come abroad."

"Nay, surely," said she, "that were madness. How fortunate a chance that thou didst pass, Francis, in time to save him. How thinkest thou the brawl began?"

"Best not enquire, child," said he; "a wild young man is our dear Hal."

"Thou liest in thy throat," cried I, with as much strength as I had, which was not much.

"He waketh, and thinketh himself still in his quarrel," said Francis.

Then coming nearer to me, he said low, "My wife shall tend thee. If thou art wise thou wilt not trouble her with the story of how thou broughtest thy hurt upon thee."

I turned me to the wall and answered him not; but because it is an ill thing to tell a woman, "Thy husband is a villain and hath set on me," therefore did I take his counsel. Also I was firmly purposed to escape and go on my way; yet because as yet my brain was all confused, I saw not how to compass it; therefore did it suit me well to be secret and say nothing.

Mistress Cecily—Madam Fowell must I now call her—dressed my wound, if not with the wondrous skill of Mistress Lettis, yet with some deftness.

" 'Twill not need the chirurgeon," said Francis.

After a space they went into the outer room; and I lay there and chafed. I could move, though with pain, and did consider whether I could raise an alarm through the casement; but I discovered that it looked forth on the back of the hamlet on a waste ground; even should I see and call some passer by, Francis would claim the Duke's authority for all he did, and here were naught but hinds who could not resist him. Perforce must I wait. At nightfall I could essay to get me forth by the casement, if I were but sufficiently recovered. Perchance I should not be watched if they thought me too feeble to move. 'Twas a hazardous adventure; but if no better might be, I would risk my fate. At the doubt what Sir William might think of me should I fail in my mission, a burning fever seemed to seize me, so that I could scarce lie quiet on my bed.

But since I hold it foolish and unworthy of a man to give way to laments or regrets while there may be a chance of mending matters, therefore I controlled myself, and set myself to plan how being escaped I might get on my way. Just then I heard a horse neigh; the which delighted me as showing that my steed was somewhere at hand.

The evening drew on. It was a fair night, following a fair day, and only dusk, not dark. This would be better for me were I well away, but it made the escape more hazardous. Now as I pondered at what hour my attempt might best be made, and thought with grief that 'twas probable I must wait till near midnight, since Francis was late of going to rest, just then Mistress Cecily came in to look upon me; I feigned sleep, and she went forth, leaving the door open that she might hear if I awoke.

Then said Francis, who was without, "Now little love, must I leave thee."

"So soon?" she said. "Thou art but now come."

"I have business with His Grace of Northumberland this night. I did but ride forth for an errand which is happily accomplished; and faith I am glad that it hath given me opportunity to see thy winsome face if it be but for an hour."

"When comest thou again?" she asked. "When thou art not here my heart is cold. There is no summer for me without thee."

"Foolish child! I will be with thee to-morrow," and with that they kissed and parted.

By and by Madam Fowell came in to me again.

"Fair lady," said I, "I do feel me much amended."

"Of that I am glad," she said. "Yet I pray you be very careful and move not much."

"Nay, Madam," said I, "I purpose to move indeed, for my business brooks not delay. Therefore I beg of you to bid my steed be made ready; and I will rise and don my apparel."

"It is impossible," she said. "As your nurse I may not suffer it. Dream not of it."

"Dear lady," said I, "you know that a man must put his duty before aught else. Ask your husband if it be not so."

"Sir," she said, "my husband bid me care for you, and specially advised that you came not forth. Now see I why he said this, and that he understood your rashness."

"Francis," said I, "doth take too tender a care for me."

"Not so, sir," she said. "A movement might cost you dear. Francis did well to bid me that I suffer not such rashness."

"I pray you," quoth I, "ask Francis to come hither. He will understand the necessity for my going forth." This I said confidently, having heard his departing horse hoofs.

"Alas," said she, "it grieves me much that he hath even now left me to return to London. Therefore I pray you, Master Sture, be patient, and to-morrow when he comes he will do all for you that man can do; perchance he might conduct your affairs for you, since you cannot yourself attend to them."

"Madam," I answered, "none may do my business, but myself alone; and each hour of delay may work much let and harm to me. I tell you of a truth that you can do me no greater ill-service, than to keep me here."

She was moved, for she was of a yielding nature; yet her obedience and trust unto Francis worked hard against me. "Tarry but till morn," was her cry, "and Francis will be here again."

With that, as if she feared her own resolution, she turned and left me. For a moment I purposed to rise and force my way forth; but I heard some of Francis' men about; nor could I hope to get my steed, save by Madam Fowell's orders, unless I took it in the night by stealth. Therefore I decided to wait till nightfall; and if it fell that I could not prevail on Madam Cecily to let me go, then would I force my way. She came not: perchance she would

not be wearied by my prayers and complaints. When darkness had fallen, save for the moon which lighted up the chamber, I reared myself up with trouble and pain and donned my clothes. I was forced to rest awhile when this was done; but shortly I rose again and dragged me to the casement. Lo, the ground did dip down below the window suddenly, so that I should have broken my neck had I come forth through it.

Then softly I opened my chamber door, minded to steal through the house; but a stalwart groom lay sleeping on the ground in the outer chamber. Now was I almost in despair, and returning I sat upon my bed and cursed the hour that I had first seen Francis. Bethinking me that this was useless, and minding me of a maxim of my master, "All things may be done and overcome; and nought is hopeless till a man loses hope himself," I set myself again to consider, and resolved that I would wait till the dawning, when perchance the groom might go forth, and if not, then would I boldly pass him and order my horse; if he refused, I could still cut with my left arm.

I laid me down all accoutred as I was. With the first dawn Madam Fowell came again into my

chamber. It might be as nearly as I could guess between four and five of the clock. She started when she saw that I was dressed, saying, "What have you done? What madness!"

Then I rose, dissembling my weakness, and said unto her that she might see that I was well enough to go forth, and that I could no longer be stayed; therefore I prayed her of her courteousness to bid them saddle my steed.

"Sir, I dare not. Oh, sir, be governed," cried she, "wait but till Francis comes."

We did debate the matter awhile backwards and forwards. At the last quoth I, "Madam, there was a day when you needed my aid and I gave it, and that to my own hurt, for truly by keeping of your secret, I have fallen for long out of favour with my master and have suffered much."

"I know it," she cried; "I bring ever sorrow."

"Now," I went on to say, "because I have grudged not this service, if you would requite me for my loyalty unto you and your husband, I pray you let me depart and speed me on my way, for this much favour I deserve of you."

"Sir, you cannot," she said, but I saw that she was yielding. With a few more words of earnest

entreaty I prevailed. She bade them saddle afresh my steed; though even in the doing she did urge me many times to be patient and tarry.

What pain I felt in my shoulder, I will no more stop to relate than I did suffer her to perceive, for ever I feared that her resolution might change. But in good sooth I did at one moment opine that I might faint; and then should I be lost, for if Francis came before I was gone, little hope had I to come forth.

The while I waited, Madam Fowell asked me concerning her uncle and Mistress Lettis with much affection. Of her father she said naught.

Now my steed being come to the door, such a joy came over me as gave me for the moment strength, so that I raised myself, and passed forth, saluting my fair hostess, and moving with a steady, strong step; and mounting, I did rapidly urge my horse forward, free once more.

The day broke fair and smiling. My steed, fresh and willing, made his way at so good a pace that in the course of an hour I felt myself free from pursuit, and thought that I need fear nothing except the breaking down of my own strength. The movement of the horse sent a sharp pain

through my wounded shoulder with every instant, and bit by bit all power seemed to ebb away. At noon I halted for a few minutes at a small hostel, and got me a draught of water for myself and my horse. They proffered me food and ale, but neither of these could I touch; nor would I dismount, lest I should not be able to mount again. The afternoon was hot; and by moments my brain seemed to reel and whirl, so that I could with difficulty remember where I was going and what I had to do. I knew that I must go forward, and that it imported much that I should not stop nor fall from my horse. At times I staggered in my saddle and could scarce sit upright. On I went by heaths where my horse kept the track and saved himself from holes; by little woods where the trees, as they swayed in the breeze, seemed to whisper, "On, on"; by rough lanes hardest of all, where some sudden jolt startled me by the very agony of pain into consciousness, and then I felt with horror as if memory and will too were slipping away. I braced myself and still went on. With the singing in my ears I fancied I heard voices, and Francis calling me to stop, and strange cries. Then did I urge my horse, and still went on.

The Lady Elizabeth lay at her house of Hatfield in Hertfordshire, a very fair mansion conveniently situated in a wooded country at the top of a small hill, having the river Lee, a clear and pleasant stream, at the end of the park. Ere I could come at the house I must needs pass by a narrow way through a coppice. The road was very miry and rough; and because of the close tangle of shrubs and brushwood it was not possible to ease my steed by leaving the path on either side. His feet sunk deep into the mire at every step. I went slowly, but by reason of the dizziness in my head and the dimness before my eyes could not see to guide him safely. At the last he did put his foot into so deep a hole as nearly to fall, and in the recovering himself gave so great a jar to my shoulder that the wound burst forth again bleeding.

This discomposed me much. Naithless, being past the miry lane and on better ground as I began to ascend, I took courage seeing the end of my journey before me; and with the hope that I should reach my goal in safety some sense returned to my brain. The house is very stately, having a square tower something majestical in

its centre. At my summons a porter did appear, who eyed me strangely.

I said I had business of urgency with the Lady Elizabeth.

"An you come at her in that guise," grumbled he, "I'm not the porter that has let in scores of gentlefolks. You must wash you and change your robes, my young spark."

Much fearing my strength would not hold out to parley, I bade him cease his unmannerly speech and announce my coming; at the which, still grumbling, he bade me enter a little chamber, and departed.

It seemed to me as though hours passed, though perchance it was but a short time, ere there came to me a gentleman of very goodly form and countenance, and demanded my business.

"Sir," said I, "I crave audience of the Lady Elizabeth, for I have important matters for her ear."

"To-morrow," said he, "doubtless the Princess will see you. Meanwhile I will conduct you to a chamber where you may rest and refresh you, and rid you of the stains of travel."

I told him that the matter might not endure delay, not even for an hour.

"Then," said he, "entrust me with your message, for it is by no means seemly to appear before Her Highness in so disorderly a guise."

I could by no means give my message to another, and so I said; and since I feared lest even a few minutes' delay should be more than I could endure, ere my senses left me, I told him roundly it imported the Princess's safety, and prayed him to be speedy lest my wound should cause me to faint.

He yielded unto me therefore and went on my errand, and speedily returning, ushered me into a stately chamber very meetly hung with tapestry. At the upper end thereof in a high carven chair, with her maidens around her and one or two gentlemen in attendance, sat the Lady Elizabeth. She had been engaged on some embroidery, which one of her ladies held for her while she stitched.

The Princess in this the flower of her youth was of a most dazzling fairness, whose beauty was enhanced by the admirable gold of her hair. In stature she was of no great height, but of so wondrous a dignity that no man might approach her without reverence. Her forehead is lofty and

broad, her eyes blue and piercing, so that they seem to read the soul. The whiteness of her neck lay like a lily flower, bare save for the jewelled collar which she wore.*

At sight of my figure stained with blood, mud-splashed and disarrayed, she said unto the lady beside her—

"If this strange guise betokeneth not rudeness, it meaneth urgent matter." Then unto me, "Speak, sir; what would you with me?"

Kneeling, I craved her pardon, saying that nought but a knowledge that the safety of Her Highness might depend on my urgency, could have made me thus daring in approaching her.

Then she bade all stand back but the gentleman who had introduced me, and one of her maidens.

I unfolded that I brought her grievous tidings of the King's death. At this her face did whiten, and she heaved a great sigh. Then fixing her eyes on me, she said—

"How may this be? I have but now received

* Master Sture speaks of Elizabeth with the enthusiasm or extravagance of his day; but so universal is this tone, that it is evident she must have been a pretty and attractive woman, as well as a great Queen.

a summons to attend the King, seeing that he is desirous of my presence."

"Go not, Madam," cried I. "It is for this cause that my master, Sir William Cecil, hath sent me to warn you, for of a surety the King is dead, and the Duke of Northumberland doth practise that the Lady Jane Dudley be Queen."

"God's death!" quoth she. "The traitor!" and her eyes did flash. Then she asked, "What token bring you from Sir William Cecil?"

"Madam," I said, "only this: that whatsoe'er betide, my master is your true servant. 'A written word,' said he, 'is too dangerous; but the Lady Elizabeth is of a discretion to recognize the truth.'"

"Surely," said she, "he hath said these words to me. What doth he advise?"

"That you abide here, Madam, and obey no summons to the Court, for such a call is meant for your undoing."

Now with this my wound bleeding more and more, I became very faint. Then "How came you by your hurt?" asked she.

I replied that I had been set upon by an emissary of the Duke, and with that I had like to

have fallen flat upon the ground, to my great shame that I should show such feebleness before this illustrious lady; but she, advancing a few steps, said, "You are shrewdly hurt!" and herself caught and sustained me, calling to her gentleman the while to help me. I tried to make some meet reverence, but a deadly sickness had seized on me, and they bore me away, taking me forthwith to a bedchamber and laying me down; and my wound inflaming, I lay there for three weeks.

Wherefore of all the short reign of the ill-starred Lady Jane, I know nothing of my own knowledge. It hath been said by many that Sir William Cecil was part contriver in that device by which the Lady Jane was made Queen, in proof whereof they point to his hand signing the paper. But the care with which he sent me to warn the Lady Elizabeth doth sufficiently show where his good will lay; also Queen Mary received him to her favour, the which she had not done to one who had willed to keep her from the Crown. The Lords of Arundel and Shrewsbury and other the Lady Mary's great supporters did also sign the device, and did feign great friendship unto the Duke; whereas Sir William signed but as

witness at the King's order, and showed plainly that he had no liking unto the scheme. But since it hath been brought in accusation against him that he did dissemble in the matter, I say that had he not done so, the Lady Elizabeth had had no warning. If a robber come into your house, do you discover yourself to the man?

As 'tis well known, all men soon sided with Queen Mary, and she entered London in great triumph; of all which at the time, I knew nothing, lying in peril of death, though well tended at the Lady Elizabeth's house.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN these days Sir Martin wrote in his diary as followeth:—

"*July* 10*th.*—There hath come sure news of the King's death, whom God receive in His mercy. There be rumours that the Lady Jane Dudley should be made Queen against the right of the Lady Mary's Grace. Master Walter did bear me news that the King by letters patent willed that the Lady Jane should be heir to the Crown, and the heirs male of her body. Master Walter did ask advice if he should go to fight for the Lady Jane: prevailed with him that he went not.

"13*th Day.*—The 10th day of this month was the Lady Jane proclaimed Queen.

"16*th Day.*—Great stir in all the country—some for the Lady Jane, some for the Lady

Mary, but by far the greater part do favour the Lady Mary.

"*17th Day.*—This day came Stephen (Dr. Astele was thus called at his christening) to speak to Master Alanson and Master Walter that they should declare for the Lady Mary. The Lady Mary is in Norfolk, and with her many persons of distinction; also the town folk of Yarmouth have acknowledged her with many loyal words and deeds; though there be a great company there that do much favour the new preachers. The Duke of Northumberland hath gone forth to fight the Lady Mary; and 'tis like, saith Stephen, that so soon as he be gone, he will find his new-made Queen forsaken. Of this he had belike some fear, for said Stephen, 'I did hear that as he came through the council chamber he did say unto the Earl of Arundel, "I pray God you be true to me." Then said the Earl he was very sorry he might not go with him, and that in his presence he could find it in his heart to spend his blood, even at his foot. So,' said Stephen, 'the Duke went forth deceived, for of a surety my Lord of Arundel is staunch to the Lady Mary.' I like not such untruth.

"*21st Day.*—The Lady Mary hath been proclaimed in London. God save the Queen! The people rejoiced greatly, throwing their caps into the air, and some cast money from the windows; others made great bonfires; the bells rang, and with shouting and singing of those in the streets scarce could a man hear another speak.

"*27th Day.*—There come rumours of Lady Mary's success from all parts, and that all men cleave unto her. Mr. Secretary is gone to meet the Lady Mary. News that the Duke of Northumberland hath been taken prisoner at Cambridge. So endeth this proud man's vain glory. God have mercy on him. 'Tis said the Duke of Suffolk did himself proclaim the Lady Mary's Grace as Queen.

"*August 1st.*—My Lady the Duchess of Northumberland hath been prisoner in the Tower since the 23rd of July. Also my Lord Guildford and the Lady Jane. 'Tis said this poor lady did accept the Crown unwillingly, being of tender years and thereto constrained by her father. Report doth tell of her as of a gracious lady and learned and of a religious

mind, though over much inclined towards the foreign ministers. Pray God that the coming of the Lady Mary to her own be of service to the cause of godliness; for of late there hath been much pulling down of altars and goodly work, set up for God's glory.

"8*th Day.*—The 3rd day of August came the Queen Mary's Grace to London, and with her a great retinue very honourable. The Lady Elizabeth was with her; before her 740 velvet coats, and ladies and gentlemen following 180. Also men from Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire, and gentlemen's servants 10,000. The Lady Mary's Grace did stay at Allgate Street to hear an oration that one of the poor children made that stood there, but she said nothing to them. 'Tis said that the Duke of Northumberland and others be already condemned to die. The old Bishop of London* is delivered out of the Tower and Dr. Cox cometh into his place; the Bishop of Winchester † hath been released and kissed by the Queen's Grace. Here are men quiet.

"10*th Day.*—This day came Stephen very

* Bonner. † Gardiner.

joyful and full of news, as that when the Bishop of London came forth much people did welcome him, and as many of the women as might, kissed him. He did kneel on the steps of Paul's to give his thanks to God, and some of the people rang the bells for joy. Yet when Master Bourne did preach at Paul's, there were those that did pull him out of the pulpit, so that he had like to have been killed. God mend the strife of this our land. An old priest hath said mass * at S. Bartholomew's, but the people came near to pull him to pieces. For this saith Stephen shall our Queen soon take order, and would have had me to use again the Latin service, but I would not."

Note, concerning this, that Dr. Astele did rave sore at Sir Martin, calling him no better than a heretic; whereto he made answer that God did understand both tongues, the Latin and the English, but the people only the English.

"11*th Day.*—I hear naught of Master Fowell nor of my poor Cecily. No man knoweth

* The service in Latin and without communicants was spoken of as the mass. The word had no reference to a belief or disbelief in the real presence, but was considered to imply a sacrifice for sin apart from the disposition of the worshippers.

where they be. Stephen hath no tidings of them, and saith that he desireth none. He hath cast her off as a wanton. Would God that she might be restored to us. God forgive me that I cared not better for her whiles she was with us.

"Lettis hath something flagged of late, and her cheeks be pale.

"13*th Day.*—There be tidings through Sir William Cecil's household that Master Sture hath behaved himself bravely in carrying news unto the Lady Elizabeth, but that he hath been sore hurt, and lyeth in Hertfordshire sick. 'Tis a lovable youth, yet must he not have my Lettis, for I doubt me he hath not a firm and stable mind to withstand temptation." (Thus wrongly had Francis caused me to be judged.) "When she heard the news her eyes shone, and she cried, ''Twas bravely done.' Then went she forth in haste, and returning I might perceive that she had been weeping. I misdoubt me she hath a liking for him; yet methinks this strange passion of love hath not yet gone deep with her. 'Tis a thing best resisted at the outset.

"*28th Day.*—The 18th day of August was proclamation made by the Queen's Grace that she 'willed all men to embrace that religion which all men knew she had of long time observed, and meant, God willing, to continue the same, willing all men to be quiet, and not call men the name of heretic or papist, but each man to live after the religion he thought best 'till further order were taken concerning the same.' God give her wisdom and guide her unto a right settlement in these matters. The Church of Christ is one, yet we bite and devour one another.

"This 18th day died the Duke of Northumberland for his treason, and did hear the mass with the old ceremonies, and receiving the sacrament did say, 'I believe the Holy Sacrament here most assuredly to be our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.'

"Also Dr. Bowreman, which said the mass before the Earl of Warwick and Sir John Gates, did bid them that they must confess the sacrament to be the same God which died on the cross for our redemption, and not a phantastical God, said he, as the heretics made him. Me-

thinks that though of these things he made much disputation, yet shall we never come nigher to understanding, and 'twere better be content with our Lord's words, 'This is My body.' The Bishop of Winchester, seeing that in King Henry's days he did seek right earnestly for a goodly reformation of the Church, should now be apt for moderate courses; yet when men do see some running to great lengths, then do they straightway fear to move at all. Stephen doth charge me that I be in these matters as the Laodiceans, neither hot nor cold. From this may God preserve me and all of us.

"This 3rd day of September Master Sture returned. His health is scarce restored, but his wound is healed. He came to see me, bearing himself very friendly, yet respectfully: he looked very frequently upon Lettis the while she tarried in the chamber, till I bid her go abroad on my errands."

Thus much of Sir Martin's Day Book for one while.

Ere I returned home, being minded to bring tidings of Madam Fowell unto her uncle and

Mistress Lettis, I stayed me at the village, and with some precaution went unto Francis' house. Lo, the door was shut and barred, and no one within, and enquiring of the neighbours, they told me that the gentleman and his spouse and all his servants were departed thence, and none knew whither.

My master received me with commendation; also he told me that the Lady Elizabeth's Grace had spoken well of me.

On the 30th day of September the Queen's Grace went from the Tower to London towards her coronation with very much state and splendour. Her Grace sat in a chariot drawn by six horses covered with red velvet. Her gown was of blue velvet and ermine, and on her head a circlet of gold with precious stones very heavy. She bore up her head with both her hands by reason of this weight, and her face seemed somewhat white and peaked, and scarce quite content. After her came another chariot with other six horses, wherein sat the Lady Elizabeth, in a gown of white, in which she showed of most dazzling fairness. Opposite to her sat the Lady Anne of Cleves with her

back forward. Before the Queen went a goodly company of gentlemen and knights and judges and bishops, the new Knights of the Bath, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord High Treasurer with scale and mace, the Duke of Norfolk, and the Earl of Oxford, who bare the sword before her. After the Lady Elizabeth's chariot came sundry ladies on horseback, and dressed in red velvet; also other chariots. As they passed along were pageants made for the Queen, as one by the Genoese of a little maid very fair borne by two men in a chair, and four great giants with them, and the little maid did salute the Queen. The Easterlings made one very quaint with a man that did fly down as she passed by Gracechurch Corner; and at the end of Gracechurch Street was a pageant made by the Florentines with gates very high, and on the great gate tables of cloth of silver with verses, gratifying, in praise of the Queen, and above four pictures, and on the top an angel clothed in green, so made that he did put a trumpet to his mouth; and at that moment a trumpet did veritably sound. Methinks some one secretly concealed did blow; but the crowd marvelled

and gaped, thinking the sound made by the angel.

Now as I stood there watching, I heard a voice beside me—

"Thus do these liars their miracles! They be in good practice."

It was Francis. He laughed when I turned, saying: "So thou didst trick me, Harry. I bear thee no malice; nay, methinks sith we have failed, 'tis well the Lady Elizabeth is safe. I am glad I touched thee so lightly, but would they had sent me to stop another messenger; then he were now feeding the worms, and one that sitteth up on high had perchance changed places with her prisoners. Thou findest my discourse dangerous. I disappear, but the game is not played out yet."

With that he was gone again, to my great content.

There were other very goodly pageants, as at Cornhill, where were three children for Grace and Virtue and Nature, and the hindmost that was Grace, had a crown on her head, and they sang verses praising the Queen; and at the little conduit there was given the Queen by the City, by a child, a purse with a thousand marks of gold, the

which she received very graciously; and after that at Paul's, where the children and men sang, she listened somewhile and seemed well pleased. In Paul's churchyard were children with tapers of sweet scent, and on Paul's steeple a man stood and knelt upon the weathercock, which was a great wonder to see; and the crowd that ran together many of them praised the Queen, but some were silent.

The next day was the Queen crowned, she going afoot from the old palace to the church about eleven of the clock. There were so many ceremonies, she led round the altar many times, with anointing and crowning and all done with every old custom that could be thought of, that it was four of the clock when all was finished. Without the palace was a kitchen made with boards; and that evening was very much waste meat cast out, and the base people scrambled for it, which was an ill sight. There was a great lout grovelling in the dirt and kicking his fellows away and thrusting with huge long arms, so that he knocked down a poor woman that strove to take a piece of broken meat. I causing him to move with the flat of my rapier and making way for her, he turned on me a scowling evil visage,

and muttered a curse, and something that sounded like "One day, Master Sture!" and then slunk back like the coward he was, and behold it was Hodge.

My master, as is known, had early made his submission unto the Queen, and was by her received with favour; yet did he during the whole of this reign live much in retirement and quiet, seeing that in matters of religion his mind was not with the Queen's mind. For all that, he did not think it needful so to set himself in opposition unto the laws of the Queen's Grace as to separate himself from the rites of the Church as enforced by her, as did the Bishops Ridley and Hooper, and many others both of priests and laymen, who were condemned to die shamefully and cruelly. "For," said he, "a good citizen doth conform unto the laws of the state; as for his thoughts they are between him and God," and again he said, "God hateth not the Latin tongue." Also once when he and Sir Martin were conversing together, Sir Martin did say—

"Of a truth there be many things which I regret to see re-established. Yet these be but the husks and shell of religion, as it were the outer garment or trapping. And though we may grieve that the

maid be too much bedizened, yet that which really importeth is that we clasp her firmly to our hearts. I mean that we do love the Lord, and serve Him in our lives."

Then said Sir William, "You speak well. Let us wait patiently."

Very grievous were the troubles of those who could not so wisely conform themselves, and in especial of such priests as had married. These from the very first of Queen Mary's reign were punished and forbid to minister; though, so that the woman who lived with him were not his wife, a man might rest very well in quiet. But all these distresses came not at once; and at the first men did hope the Queen's Grace might leave religion as she found it; and yet it was a strange expectation.

So early as the beginning of November came news that the Queen would make a marriage with the King of Spain, the which was much misliked by the greater part of the people, so that everywhere was stir and discontent. My master said naught on the matter good or bad. The winter wore away. Sir William was most favourable unto me; and my Lady Mildred did seek occasion to say gracious words, being pleasured when she saw me

with the little Mistress Elizabeth; only with Sir Martin could I not attain unto the old terms of friendship. He was kind; but he welcomed me not to the house, and Mistress Lettis I did see but very rarely, she seeming to avoid my company, the which moved me strangely to think more and more of her. She had increased in beauty at this time. In my thoughts I likened her to a flower, and in especial to the rock rose that groweth freely at my home in Devonshire, she having in her face something of the exceeding delicacy of that flower, yet withal a look about her of strength as in the fibres of the same plant.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN December came the ambassadors of the King of Spain to treat of the Queen's marriage with that prince, to the great grief of most; so that even the boys in the streets of London pelted the ambassadors with snowballs. Sir William kept himself secluded and quiet from the Court, employing himself in study, which he much loved. Many indeed asked of him counsel and advice, the which he gave with great caution, for had he not walked warily at this time, he had been in much danger. He had for an under secretary a very worthy man, Master Roger Alford, who came into his service some time earlier. 'Twas he who did afterwards write a true narrative of his behaviour at the time of the Lady Jane's being made Queen, to answer those things which his enemies falsely did bring against him. Though Master Alford was not of so diverting a humour as

Francis, yet was he both discreet and wary; but through all this winter there was something of sadness and fear over our household. My Lady Mildred did sigh sometimes very heavily. Master Ambrose did cite so many and grievous instances from the ancients of the ill fate of countries, and make so many lamentable quotations, as were fitted to send all who heard him into a most noxious melancholy.

"'Ætas parentum pejor avis, tubit, nos nequiores, mox detinos, progeniem vitiosiorem,'" said he. "The days of our parents, more dissolute than those of our forefathers, produced us more wicked than they; we who are destined to produce a more vicious progeny still.

'Peras imposuit Jupiter nobis duas:
Propriis repletam, vitiis post tergum debit,
Alièonis ante pectus suspendit gravem.'

Jupiter has loaded us with a couple of wallets: the one filled with our own vices, he has placed at our backs; the other heavy with those of others, he has hung before. I much fear that the welfare of our country will for ever decay. 'Plus est quam vite salusque quod ferit.' What we lose is more than life and safety."

He would cause his little pupil to read all the miserable stories of the fate of kingdoms, dwelling on such sentences as "Sœva jussa, contumas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentum." *

"In such days," would he say, "how true it was—

'Quoanque aspicias nihil est nisi pontus et aer,
Nubibus hoc tremidus fluctibus ille minax.'

Whichever way you look there is nothing but sea and air; the latter laden with clouds, the former threatening with billows."

In January the marriage of the Queen was determined; but it was decreed that King Philip should not have rule in this land, as the Spaniards would fain have had it. Six days after came the news that Sir Thomas Wyat, who had proclaimed the Queen with so much loyalty in the disturbances concerning the Lady Jane, was now risen against the Spanish match and had ta'en the city of Exeter. Thenceforward rumours came thick and fast, as that there were risings in Kent and in the west, and then that Wyat did march on

* Tacitus. Cruel commands, continued denunciations, deceitful friendships, and the destruction of the innocent.

London, the Queen's Grace behaving herself very bravely, but all men in great disturbance and commotion.

'Twas the 3rd of February, being Saturday, when Wyat marched on London and came into Southwark, and from there would have gone into London, but could not. In Southwark 'tis but truth to say he behaved himself right orderly, paying for all that his men took, and on Shrove Tuesday, being the 6th of February, he marched out towards Kingston. The men of Wymbleton had held themselves for the most part quiet and loyal. Young Master Alanson had gone off to join the rebels and ta'en with him some three or four fellows; but save these none had stirred. My master was at this time at Stamford, and with him Master Bluet. No man ever dared to say that he was in any wise concerned in this insurrection of Wyat's, though the Lady Elizabeth fell thereby into great danger and men charged her with being therein herself involved; the which slander doth show even as false an opinion of her discretion as of her goodness; for this mighty lady hath too great a wisdom to be drawn into a plot so unripe and ill-considered, even as she had too

great a virtue to aid in a design against the Queen's Grace. In all matters at this time, as now in her glorious reign, she relied on the counsel of Sir William Cecil; though for a long season they forbore to send letters to one another, the times being so dangerous.

My lord being removed to Stamford there to attend to the affairs of his estates, I had command to follow him so soon as I should have set some household matters in order at Wymbleton. Scarcely was he gone ere the rumours began of Sir Thomas Wyat's march on London, and next did we hear that he was even in Southwark. Two days after, about one of the clock, the weather being very fair and mild for the season of the year and the sun shining brightly, there gathered a little crowd upon a vacant place of land near the common. I being abroad and coming to the place, espied Francis Fowell who was speaking unto the men, and that with much gesture and vehemence.

"Judge," he said, "all of you what harm shall happen unto the realm should the Spaniards come to be our masters; if we should be under their subjection, they would use us as slaves and villains, spoil us of our goods and lands, and take from us

our wives and daughters. Now for the avoidance of these miseries hath the brave man Sir Thomas Wyat with his followers ta'en upon them this enterprise. He who hath a stout English heart let him join with us; for we will spend our blood to the last drop in this quarrel. You Master Walter, and you, and you," he said, singling out those among the crowd that he did know, "ye be not of the men who will sit down and bear such injuries as these base Spaniards shall do unto you. If we wait till they be established in the land, then shall it be too late to struggle. Wherefore arm you now, and let us join together, that we deliver the Queen from these ill counsellors, who have advised her to a thing bringing so great a misery on all of us. Good commoners of England, will ye be ruled by foreign rascals? Nay, I trow not."

Now at this there was a stir among the people, and cries of "Hear, Master Fowell! down with the Spaniards!"

Then did I cry loudly, "Hear him not. He counsels you to treason."

"What! Harry," quoth Francis, "thou, the champion of the Lady Elizabeth, thou wouldst

hinder her friends? Bethink ye, all wise men, how shall that gracious lady fare under the Spaniard? Her life will not be safe. He who wishes well to the Lady Elizabeth will follow us."

Then was there still greater murmuring among the crowd and loud talking; and Francis worked with one and another; and other men that were with him urged on gentle and simple these and such like things. In another moment began a cry, "A Wyat, a Wyat!" and some shouted for the Lady Elizabeth. Just then, when it seemed as if they all would follow Francis, Sir Martin came running:

"Friends," cried he, "what meaneth all this tumult?"

"'Tis the priest," said Francis; "he cometh to persuade you all to your harm." Then said he with a loud voice, "All brave men and true, tarry not. Come with speed. Sir Thomas Wyat marcheth even now across the heath out yonder. Haste to join him."

"Stay," called out Sir Martin, with a clear voice that rose as high as Francis' tones above the din. "First, my children, listen to me."

"The old man is doting," said Francis; but

the most part of the people said, "Hear Sir Martin; we will listen to him."

"Children," then said he, "know ye not that the Queen hath proclaimed Sir Thomas Wyat a traitor. Ye fear the Spaniard. How much more need have ye to fear, if ye be found in rebellion against the Queen. Then are your lives justly forfeit; and God who fighteth for the right shall be against you."

"The Lady Elizabeth!" shouted Francis. "follow Sir Thomas for right and the Lady Elizabeth."

"The Lady Elizabeth!" cried Sir Martin; in his voice there was a great anger. "She hath no title to the throne superior to the Lady Mary. Dare not to mix up that noble lady's name with plots of treason. Herein, indeed, ye do her foul wrong. Therefore may all the evils that we dread accrue unto her. She is more righteous than to mix herself in these stratagems. My friends, ye have acknowledged the Queen as queen of right. Be not now drawn into treason against her. And if it be that Sir Thomas Wyat hath indeed left Southwark and is even now near unto us, see ye not that it is because he hath

failed of his purpose: else were he in London, and not turned back from it."

"Curse on thy shrewdness," said Francis under his breath. Sir Martin came nearer to him, and speaking very fervently said, "Master Fowell, why do you mix yourself with these treasonable designs? Believe me, they cannot prosper."

"Believe me, oh most reverend, they will," said Francis, mockingly, "and Cecily shall queen it with the best."

"Cecily!" said Sir Martin; "tell me at least where she is that she may have a refuge with me; else when thou art undone, and thou wilt surely be, what will become of her?"

"The fox would fain have the pullet to guard," he answered, "I doubt it not. You and her bigot father are all at one with the Spanish devils that would tear our wives from us, and make them dainty morsels for themselves. Listen, friends," he shouted to the crowd. "Follow me, and ye shall be saved from the deadly evils that will surely fall on you if ye tamely yield to the Spaniard. They will harry and burn and rob and slay you. Up and fight for God and your lives and your wives and maidens!"

But the people had been changed from their purpose. "This man is deceiving you," then cried Sir Martin. "He would lead you to your destruction. Sir Thomas Wyat doth retreat. Master Lewston, arrest this man in the Queen's name."

"Will you suffer this, my men?" shouted Francis in furious anger; but no man stirred to help him, and some said, "Take him. He would have drawn us to ruin"; and others, "Get you gone; we want no traitors."

Seeing his cause was lost, he flung himself on his horse, and calling to Sir Martin, "Thou hast won, priest, but I will repay thee some day," galloped away, no man hindering him; and of a surety Sir Martin was better pleased that he was gone, and had counted on this that he would not wait to be taken.

Thus did Sir Martin save the people of Wymbleton from the dangers of Sir Thomas Wyat's rebellion; and every one went to his home.

Mistress Lettis that had wandered from casement to door and door to gate, and back again to the window, being bidden by her uncle not to stir abroad, yet being very desirous to see or

hear something, now did run to greet Sir Martin: and at first she would scarcely believe some hurt had not come to him, or that all the village was not drawn after Sir Thomas Wyat, for said she, "You look both sad and downcast. Uncle, what evil hath chanced?"

"None, child," he answered. "God hath preserved us here that no man hath been drawn after the treason of Sir Thomas. I am sad for Cecily. It was Master Fowell that incited the people. I fear me he is deep dyed in this mischief."

At this she fell to weeping, saying, "Cecily, my Cecily! Uncle, could we not find her?"

"He feareth us, as one who has done another a wrong ever feareth him," then said Sir Martin. "The Lord guard the child, even as He did search for His lost sheep."

The next morn I journeyed to Stamford; and soon after we heard that Sir Thomas Wyat was prisoner and all the rebellion suppressed. Of Francis nothing was known. He was not like to be taken alive; but whether he were dead or escaped none could tell. Only Sir Martin and Mistress Lettis deemèd it most like that he was

safe, else had Madam Fowell surely returned to them.

The time was full of fears and dangers. The Lady Jane and the Lord Guildford Dudley were beheaded as traitors, which was great pity for that fair lady; and many others both of gentles and simples. At every gate of London was set up a gallows, also at the bridge foot one, in Southwark two pair, at Leadenhall one, two in Cheapside, in Fleet Street and about Charing Cross three or four pair, and in many other places about the City. Also in Kent and in many other places in the country were raised great number of gallows. And because there was not place enough for them in the prisons, they were fain to keep the poorer sort of prisoners eighty on a heap in the churches till they were taken forth to be hanged. The Lady Elizabeth was sent for to the Court, but excused herself by reason of her then sickness. Presently after Sir Thomas Wyat being arraigned for treason, he owned that he had sent a letter to the Lady Elizabeth's Grace to bid her to get as far from the City as she could; and some said that he implicated her and the Lord Courtenay in his treason; but on

the scaffold he declared that neither they nor any other then in durance knew of his purpose. Also Sir Thomas stoutly maintained that he had no intent save to prevent the coming of strangers into the realm; but whether that were true I know not. On the 10th of March, while Sir Thomas was yet in the tower, was the Lady Elizabeth brought a prisoner thither on charge of being mixed with this conspiracy, and was so straitly watched that scarcely might any one come at her.

About this time my lord returned to Wymbleton; and so soon as he was come Sir Martin sought him and held great converse with him concerning Madam Cecily; and after a while, being filled with much grief for her and not knowing where she might be and in what trouble, Sir Martin did advise to travel himself to London, that he might seek her out. Seeing that she was no more in that house where I had been detained prisoner, I thought it unneedful to tell of Francis' attack upon me, and none knew who had given me my wound.

Sir Martin sought out in London all those who had known Francis; but he could find no trace of him, nor learn aught of what had befallen Madam

Cecily. He had yet another mission which was held a secret from all. 'Twas bruited abroad that the Lady Elizabeth was urged to throw herself on the Queen's mercy, as though she should have committed some treason. And because that all acts that be nevertheless in themselves innocent, may lightly be stretched to treason, so there be the will to misconstrue them, and that the Lady Elizabeth had many foes that would fain have seen her slain, 'twas needful that she should so warily bear herself that she might escape all shadow of blame. Also my master did most ardently long to encourage her with words of friendship. Yet was all sending of letters forbidden, nor might any man see her. Sir Martin therefore, having an old friendship with one Master Sturton that had office in the Tower, and being the less suspected in that his brother was so ardent a papist and he a moderate man and one much esteemed, sought if he might any wise communicate with the Lady Elizabeth. First he enquired if it were possible that any man might see her, but making cautious question on that point to Master Sturton, he did answer—

"No man or woman may see the Princess. These be the strict orders of the Queen."

Now as it happed, the while they were conversing there came in a little lad of some five years, the which carried a posy in his hand; and when Sir Martin praised the flowers, the child said, "They be for the pretty Lady Elizabeth."

"I rejoice that the poor lady hath this solace," quoth Sir Martin.

"Yea," said Master Sturton; "so small a child can give neither news nor message, wherefore we deem he cometh not within the Queen's meaning, and do gladly pleasure the Princess, who loveth children and loveth flowers; methinks also she prizeth the homage and devotion even of so tiny a follower, and finds therein comfort."

Then Sir Martin thinking, framed a plan, and going out into the country long before day, brought from thence a bunch of daffodils very sweet and large, and made them into a posy; but about the stems of the midmost flowers was there a little piece of paper whereon was writ but these words: "Madam, your true servants watch. Rest in your innocency."

Returning to the Tower, he said unto Master Sturton that he would very gladly send these flowers unto the Lady Elizabeth by the little lad

if it might be done, seeing that they would be pleasant unto a prisoner, being tokens of the country and of spring. He, assenting, called the child, taking the posy in his own hand, and admiring the blooms. Then did Sir Martin's heart beat quick; but the boy coming, he turned him unto him and said: "Here be more flowers for your posy for the lady. Tell her they come from the country."

Then said Master Sturton: "Will you undo and mix them with the cowslips and anemones?"

"Good!" said Sir Martin; "or look they not well thus?" and ere the other could unfasten them, which had surely disclosed the paper, he did deftly arrange them in the centre of the other flowers.

"See," said he, "so do the colours blend and harmonize. Here must one add a primrose, and here a cowslip, and here an outer ring of blue-bells."

Then Master Sturton again took them in his hand, turning them round and round, and praising the skilful handling of Sir Martin. At the last, however, he gave them to the child, who ran off gaily. Now the Lady Elizabeth took the air within the lower walls, and the child running up

to her quickly cried: "See, see, lady! These be fresh from the country."

"They be the more welcome," said the Lady Elizabeth. "And how didst thou come by them?"

"Sir Martin gave them," said the lad, and would have prattled more, but the guard that stood by bade him be silent.

"The babe speaketh no secrets," then said the Lady Elizabeth, and she kissed the child and let him go.

But because in those days there was no circumstance too small to be watched and noted, she, hearing these flowers came from the country, looked at them narrowly and spied a little bit of white among the stalks; and with a feint of playing with them as she walked up and down, she drew it off unseen, having some hope that it might be a message from her friends. Then at the first moment that she could, looking at the words there set down, they did, she was wont afterwards to say, greatly comfort and hearten her.

The little lad returned mightily pleased that the Lady Elizabeth had praised his flowers, and so gave good hope to Sir Martin that she had safely received the paper; but for certainty he could have

none. Shortly after, the child was forbid to carry his posy, the council fearing lest her friends should thereby send news. They had the lad before them and questioned him very strictly, but finding out no treason nor any sending of messages, did content themselves with forbidding the giving of the flowers.

Sir Martin's private purpose, the finding of Madam Cecily, did in no wise prosper; and he returned unto his home very sorrowful. Also many things that he did see and hear in London troubled his heart. For there was much sorrow and wailing in the City for the many that were dead; also dissension among the people, so that even the boys to the number of three hundred assembled themselves in a field and fought one half for the Queen, one half for Wyat; and the boy that was King of Spain was taken and hanged that he barely escaped with his life.

"Alas!" said Sir Martin, "these be grievous days."

But Dr. Astele exulted; natheless he said there could be no peace till the root was cut off: 'twas little use lopping at the branches; and by the root he did mean the Princess Elizabeth, and

by the branches the Lady Jane and those others that suffered.

So Sir Martin returned unto his home, and was sad.

During the next months were more executions and imprisonments, also great preparations for the coming of the King of Spain. Nothing being proven against the Lady Elizabeth, she was sent prisoner to Woodstock, and kept by the Lord Williams.

In June were the gallows taken down in London afore the King of Spain's entry; and in July came the King. My master kept himself still and quiet, and planted trees in his garden, wherein he had store of rare plants and flowers; and whenever chance offered, he got of these from foreign lands that he might try their growth here. Often he deigned to converse with me of these matters, and was curious concerning all manner of herbs and shrubs that grow in the Devon country; and once he said unto me. "'Tis a more grateful task, Harry, than the tending of kingdoms; for though belike the slug or snail may mar the bloom, or the little coney gnaw the stalk, yet is thereby the head of the gardener not endangered."

That day came Mistress Lettis with the present of a plant from her father, being a pink that with divers earths and watering of mingled waters he had tended to a rare excellence. Mistress Lettis had a brightness in her face the which of a long time I had not noted there. After she had given the present to my master, and we were turned away, I saying to her that she looked like one who had just heard good tidings, she answered—

"Yea, sooth am I. We have heard from my Cecily that she is well and loves us, though she be not able to see us; but perchance, sir, you know more of the matter than we, since methinks her husband trusts you."

This did I disclaim earnestly, saying that she did me wrong to think I had news that I had not conveyed unto her and her uncle; and 'twas but hard-hearted to judge a man ever and always by one fault.

"I would be loth to wrong you," said she, gently. "For Cecily, she saith that she is happy. How can she be with such a man?"

I did answer that methought Mistress Cecily loved him with so great a devotion that in his presence all was bright to her.

"He, so false!" she said; "so cruel! Never could I so love! How can she trust him that hath deceived her father and us?"

I answering with the trite phrase that love is blind, she said: "My love could not grow were it not rooted in a fond admiration of goodness and greatness, but would die even in its birth. For liking may be born of manly grace and pleasant ways, but it must soon fade away, if these be all it hath to feed upon; but if it may have the nutriment of a worthy respect unto high qualities, and a delight in great deeds nobly attempted, oh, then I can conceive it should grow so strong that nought could shake it: for such a one could I spend my life itself."

Therewith suddenly blushing as ashamed at her own eagerness, and half remorseful for her plainness of speech, she gathered her wimple round her with a little stately grace, and saying, "Good day to you, sir," left me with speed. And from that hour I knew that I loved her with my whole heart.

Yet I thought it scarce wise to shew her my heart, partly for that I knew her uncle mistrusted me still, and partly that my fortunes would not yet permit me to marry.

Little chance was there of doing great deeds just now, and to live quiet and unnoticed was for the time the most to which we did aspire. At this I inwardly chafed greatly; for without either adventure or requited love, of what use is a man's life unto him? I had surely tried my fate with Mistress Lettis, but that at this time I was much employed by my master at Stamford, and therefore for the most part was parted from her.

In the summer was the marriage with the Spaniard, and shortly thereafter such strict order ta'en with regard to religion, that 'twas plain those were in much danger that conformed not unto the manner ordained. Now of the high matters of doctrine I do not trouble me to understand much; and methinks 'tis hard men should be burnt for that which is above their comprehension. For the first ten years of our most gracious Queen Elizabeth's reign, in these latter times, did all men worship side by side in peace; till now the Pope, whom God confound, and the Spaniards have changed these things and turned loyal men into traitors. In Queen Mary's days a man might not say he disbelieved in aught that the bishops affirmed; yet might some live tranquilly so they

would hold their peace and go to confession and mass. That my lord was a friend of Cardinal Pole did mightily help us; and the trusted counsellors of the Queen said of Sir William that he was an honest man though a Protestant. But those men who so hated the mass, that they could not bring themselves to harken unto it, thereby stood in danger of their lives. Worst of all was it for priests that had wives, for the decree went forth that they should separate from them and be punished. Greatly did we wonder where Francis might be; if he had gone, as did many, beyond sea, or if he were still in hiding.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT Christmas of the year 1555 Sir Martin writ in his diary:

"Of them that confessed, and received the sacrament of the altar, the first was Sir William Cecil, next the Lady Mildred and Master Thomas Cecil; and truly the whitest soul ever I saw is the Lady Mildred."

Now as Mistress Lettis, in the afternoon of that day, issued forth to go share some games with other of her young companions that should meet at Master Lewston's, of a sudden one came rushing in through the gate and flung herself upon Mistress Lettis; and behold it was Madam Fowell, all travel-stained, and her attire, that was wont to be arranged with such care, dishevelled.

"Take me in, Lettis," she cried, "and hide me, and let me die here."

"Cecily sweet, thou art safe with us," said Lettis. "Who would hurt thee? Art thou alone?" she asked, as she drew her cousin into the house.

Bit by bit, with pants and starts and sobbing, Cecily told her tale.

"I have left my love," she said, "lest through me woe befall him. Lettis, they say 'twas mortal sin to have married him; yea, and I feared me that the father that did hear my confession would advertise some one where Francis is; then should he not only be punished for being a married priest, but hung for Sir Thomas Wyat's rebellion. The priest that abideth near our dwelling came to see why I went not to confession. Then said Francis, 'Thou must needs confess: these foxes will have it so, but say nought of me. Confess not that which is no sin, even that thou art married to a priest.' But oh! Lettis, when I knelt there and he questioned me, I could not choose but tell. Lettis, he frightened me. Must I needs go to everlasting woe and Francis too? Father Clement knoweth my father. He told me he had found out who Francis was, by other means than confession, so that he need not be secret; yet he promised me that if I would leave Francis for

ever, he would hold his peace and say nought to betray my husband. . . . Husband I must not call him! . . . My love, my love, what will he think of me? He knoweth not where I have gone."

Then she broke forth into wailings piteous to hear, and shivered, and seemed as one distraught.

Lettis kissed her, holding her firmly in her arms and murmuring fond words. "Cis, take comfort. Think how we joy to see thee again. Master Fowell will be safe now."

Then she cried again, "I have left him for love of him; but oh! my heart will break."

Sir Martin now came into the chamber, at sight of whom Cecily shuddered and shrunk from him; but he, putting his hand upon her hair, bade "God bless her."

"You say that?" she said, wildly. "Is not God's wrath upon me and upon Francis? At night I see the fires of hell that Father Clement told me the devils were heating for me;" and with that she fell again into her distraction and a passion of wild weeping.

Sir Martin bade her hush. "Hast thou forgotten," he said, "what news came down on earth to-day?"

"The Christ!" she answered, "the terrible Christ that was born of the Virgin, and will take vengeance on all that keep not their virginity."

"The Christ," he said, "that brought goodwill towards men, the Christ that turned not away the Magdalene."

"The Lord, the dear Lord that loved His mother," said Lettis.

"I disobeyed my father. Christ will avenge, I know it," said Cecily. "He will punish us for Francis' broken vow. ''Twas a mock marriage,' saith Father Clement."

"Daughter," saith Sir Martin, "thou didst wrong to disobey; and Francis did wrong truly in that he hath broken his vow which did bar him from marriage; yet do I account thy marriage a true one; and be sure, poor child, the Lord looketh not on thee unpityingly."

With all these words scarce could they soothe her into any quiet; but by and by, grown a little into calmness and exhausted with travel and sorrow, they persuaded her to lie down, and after a while she sobbed herself like a child to sleep, then waking, rose half up with a start and cry, but was stilled as she found her cousin's arm round her.

They watched and tended her all that eve; and at night she lay in Mistress Lettis' arms and started and called out now and again, and once woke, as it seemed, in a frenzy, and said that demons were chasing her,

"Because," quoth she, "I lived in a fool's paradise all this time; yea, they were near me, biding the moment to spring on me, so saith Father Clement, and now they have come."

Lettis hushing her, Cecily cried, "Thou wilt not let me go," and clung to her arm, as though she feared some one would tear her thence.

"I will not," said little Lettis. "Thou art safe;" and so in a little while she sank to rest again; and Lettis slept not, but watched her till morning dawn, when fiends depart.

With the morn she rose something stiller and more composed; but ever and anon she would turn white with great beatings of the heart, the which, said she, had come upon her of late, since they had had so great straits to endure and many alarms.

Towards noonday she sat in the outer room by the hearth. The wind raged without; and now and then there was a little driving rain. Lettis flitted

hither and thither doing her household duties, and humming snatches of Christmas carols all sweet and soothing of the Child Christ and the gentle mother, and something of peace seemed to steal over the poor harassed, maddened lady as she listened. Of a sudden was the door flung open, and there entered her father, his face most stern and rigid. Madam Cecily sprang up and looked round as if to see how to fly, but could not pass him. Then she stepped backward till she reached the wall and could go no further, and there stood, her eyes very wide dilated, her face bloodless.

"So thou art come back, wanton," he said. "Where is thy partner in sin?"

She looked at him, and her lips moved; but no sound came through them.

"Speak, lest I curse thee," said he. "Where is he that deluded thee?"

"She is ill, Uncle," cried Lettis, and she flung her arms about her. "Ask her nothing."

"Peace, child," he said. "Woman, thou canst answer me."

"I have left him," she whispered, in a voice so faint and toneless scarce could it reach the ear.

"Uncle, she hath come home," said Lettis; and

she stood between them and fronted him very bravely. "She hath left him that he may go safe and unharmed."

"Safe! unharmed!" he said. "That shall he not. Vengeance shall overtake him, and punishment shall not fail. Stand aside, maiden. Woman, there is but one way by which thou mayest redeem thy soul from destruction. Give up thy partner in guilt."

Then she gave a great shrill cry, "No, no, a thousand times no. Cruel father!"

"So thou wilt doom his soul to be lost for ever?" said he, more sternly than before.

She wrung her hands wildly and moaned.

In the distance there was a tread and the sound of a voice. No other but Madam Cecily could have discerned whose it might be. But she must have known. Flinging up her arms, she shrieked out, "I must fly. There is but one way. Christ, Mother Mary, save his soul when I am gone;" and ere they knew what she would do, she pushed back Lettis, sprang past her father, ran adown the garden walk, and out towards the common, shrieking as she went. Dr. Astele ran after her, and perchance either he or that other had reached her in

time to save her, but that they met. Francis it was that came anear the gate as she ran forth, and would have sped him after, seeing her; but her father caught him and held him fast, and they two wrestled with the fierceness of hate. Francis sought to draw his sword, but could not reach it for the other's arms; they staggered to and fro, and might not either wrench himself free. Lettis sped past them after her cousin; but that poor lady was far fleeter. At the last Francis flung the priest upon the earth, and, once freed from his grasp, ran with all his speed after the two. Dr. Astele, gathering himself from the earth stiff and sore bruised, followed as swiftly as he might. When they had gained the edge of the common, they saw how Madam Cecily flew on far in front of them, with Lettis following her, and also Sir Martin, who had been abroad in the village, and hurried after at the sound of Cecily's wild cries.

That little pool was near that lay on this side the common, and if she saw it not in her distraction, or if she did the deed of set purpose, or if she knew not what she did being dazed in her wits, none could tell; only they saw that she, falling, lay headlong there before them with her

face downward in the mere. Lettis, who gained the pool first, strove in vain to raise her, standing in the water. Sir Martin did next reach the water; but ere they two had got her to the bank, Francis, coming up, thrust them aside with rudeness, and lifted her and pressed her to his breast, and called her "Love! wife! Cecily!" and bade her "Speak. Come back to me!"

"Master Fowell, bear her to my house," said Sir Martin. "Pray God there be yet life in her."

"Fiends, you have murdered her!" he said. "Dream not to take her from me, foul priests!"

"Bear her to my house," quoth Sir Martin again, "'tis the nearest; else staying here shall she surely die."

Then Francis lifted her up and carried her as Dr. Astele came up.

"Traitor, thou escapest me not now," he said.

Francis was bent over Cecily, and belike noted him not, for he answered nought, but Sir Martin answered—

"Where God hath stricken, hold we our peace;" and he laid his arm with authority on Dr. Astele and they two also followed back to the house, Dr. Astele still muttering low words of fury.

They laid her down, and alas! 'twas very plain to see that life had gone. Francis for long would not believe it; and Sir Martin had hopes, seeing that she had been but such a moment in the water. Indeed 'twas not, as 'tis said, of drowning that she died, but rather some sudden stoppage of the vital powers,* such as doth sometimes overtake men, and in especial those that are weak and scant of breath.

Francis bent over her, calling her by a thousand endearing names, trying to revive her, and frantically demanding of Sir Martin to aid him. But when they had with all warm applications and rubbings and breathings of their breath into her mouth, tried in vain to bring her back to life, he turned fiercely on Sir Martin and Dr. Astele.

"Murderers," said he; "by what arts have you driven her to death?"

Dr. Astele, who had watched the efforts for her recovery, forgetting, as it seemed, all else, now woke again to his resentment.

"She is dead," said he. "'Tis thou art the murderer;—thou who hast brought God's wrath upon her. Traitor and heretic, I arrest thee."

* Evidently heart disease.

Francis, who was kneeling beside his dead wife, rose up and laughed ;—a sound that had something of horror in it.

"Nay," he said, "not yet. I must live that I may revenge me. Sweetheart, for each pain thou hast suffered I will exact pang for pang. Curse on this household : curse ye, each and all!"

Dr. Astele seized him by the mantle, and called on Sir Martin to aid in detaining him.

"Nay," cried Sir Martin. "Brother, let him go."

"Thou art his accomplice if thou keep him not," said Dr. Astele, holding Francis fast. Then Francis drew his sword, and Dr. Astele a little short dagger that he did wear beneath his priest's dress.

"Art armed?" quoth Francis. "Thou canst fight, fox;" and they set on, the one on the other.

Sir Martin thrust himself between, to his great danger, and dragged his brother back, receiving a wound as he did so.

"Farewell," said Francis, "for a while, till I find you again for my revenge." Then he gat him out at the door and away swiftly.

"Help me, help me with Uncle Martin!" cried

Lettis to Dr. Astcle; but as soon as his brother's grasp relaxed, he falling into Lettis' arms, Dr. Astele had followed his foe, and that poor maid was left with the wounded and the dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

BY good hap Sir Martin was not so sore hurt, but that he could direct Mistress Lettis how she should staunch and bind up his wound. That done, she did decently compose the limbs of poor Cecily, and though weeping sore the while, did not lack of power to do all which was needful. Indeed never yet did this tender maid, so frail and small and soft in seeming, fail when her service was needed.

The first notice we received of all these things was that Dr. Astele came in haste to crave audience of Sir William, begging that search might be made without delay for Master Francis Fowell, who had escaped his pursuit, disappearing among the trees that bordered the heath. Sir William gave orders without delay that diligent search should be made, but it was to none effect. Francis had vanished,

as it seemed, and could not be found. Nor was he seen again in England for some years, having, as was afterwards discovered, escaped beyond sea, the where he abode during the reign of Queen Mary.

So soon as I heard of Mistress Cecily's death, and the wound of Sir Martin, I prayed my master, seeing he was minded to send forthwith to the parson's house for tidings, that I might be the bearer of his message; which granted, I set forth with speed. Coming to the house there was seen a very sorry sight. Fair Cecily lay dead covered with a white cloth, and Sir Martin, in despite of his wound, knelt beside her in prayer, his face being white as the dead herself, and from his eyes tears streaming. Beside knelt Lettis, her face hidden, and all the pale gold of her silky hair falling about her.

At my step Sir Martin rose, and greeted me courteously, bidding me bear back tidings to Sir William Cecil that his hurt was of no account: also he did enforce upon me with great anxiety to explain that Mistress Cecily's death had been an accident of her weak health, lest the stain of self-murder should cleave to her and her kindred.

This while, Mistress Lettis had raised her face and first flushed red, and then waxed pale again, yet said no word, but gazed with so strange an air, a kind of fixed terror and horror, that I ventured not to address her lest I should intrude on her sorrow. Asking if I could do them no service, Sir Martin prayed me to summon a discreet and worthy woman that lived near by, and that might aid Lettis; and so I parted from them.

Early next day I took myself towards the house that I might know of their welfare, and shortly before I came to the door did meet Mistress Lettis coming forth. Her eyes were heavy as one who hath wept instead of sleeping; her lips, for all she did try to restrain herself, quivered pitifully when she spoke; and as it is in sorrow that the heart of a man most goeth out unto the lady he loves, so my love at the sight stirred hotly within me.

I asked her how Sir Martin did, and she answered something better. Then I told her how I grieved at Mistress Cecily's sad end.

"You!" she said, as if she would have spoken something in heat, but restrained herself. "I thank you, sir," quoth she, and would have turned away.

Then could I bear it no longer, and all my passion burst forth, and I cried out unto her, how I loved her. She stood as though amazed for a moment, then spake with great vehemence of anger. "Love me; nay, dare not to say that. Think you I would take the love of *his* friend, *his* abetter, who brought my darling to her death? I know more. You did again deceive us. She told me how she did entertain you, and care for you when wounded, yet you said nought to us. Go, sir; between you and me there can be nought but scorn and aversion."

She would have left me, but I caught her wimple.

"Mistress," I said, "you *shall* hear me. I will not again lie tamely under a false imputation."

She stood still, her figure drawn up very straight, her eyes looking away at the common towards the fatal mere, and drawing her wimple away from me she folded it close about her: yet she stood and listened.

I told her how Francis had set on me, and how for Mistress Cecily's sake, and for some liking to my cousin, I had concealed the thing, and how I had gone to see if Mistress Cecily were yet in

that house, and finding her not, judged it useless to tell where she had been.

"It may be so," said she. "I cannot trust his friend; I may not give my love to his kinsman. Sir, I love you not;" and this she spake with a great heat.

Now with this was I enforced to leave her, so was her will. I saw her not again for many days, save from afar at the funeral of Madam Fowell, which was done quietly and speedily for that she was a priest's wife; but through Sir Martin's goodness and credit with all men, and by Sir William Cecil's favour, all due ceremonies were performed for her, Sir William and Lady Cecil themselves attending that all might know hers was not self-murder. Her father came not, but left all to his brother, and himself hunted the country for Francis.

Now when some time had passed, I cast in my mind how I might again approach Mistress Lettis. As it happed, I had, a while before, found a young finch lost from the nest, and having noted how Mistress Lettis did affect small fowls, I purposed to give it to her. I had trained it to much tameness, also to whistle

very featly. One morn, therefore, I sought Mistress Lettis and presented her with the creature, praying her that she would accept it.

"Nay," said she, very coldly, "I will not deprive you of your pet."

I averred that I had but valued and treasured it, as it might minister to her pleasure.

"You are an untender master, then," said she, "to have no care for the bird you have trained."

"Not so," said I; "what creature but would be happier, being in your hands, Mistress?"

"These be foolish words," she said, "and methinks it is but cruelty to keep the little bird confined, it being, of its nature, so free a thing."

I, being vexed, did instance her sparrow, and ask was it not unkind to have caged it.

She, answering from the point, after the manner of women, made reply, "My Phil doth love me, and I love my Phil, that mindeth me of my dear cousin."

Then I loosed the bird and let it fly, saying, "Well, then, Mistress Lettis, if you will none of it, it shall try the sweets of liberty"; and therewith I left her.

Now was I cast with much melancholy. Seeing,

however, that it is unmanly to be overmuch cast down while there is duty to do in the world, I did rouse me, and was glad to be employed on service for my lord in various parts of the kingdom. I was honoured to be of his train when he went to meet and bring back the Cardinal Pole to England. The friendship of this cardinal was of much service to my master, and availed also to protect many in Wymbleton from the fury of the days that came shortly afterwards. For during these next three years were many burnt as heretics ; so that men lived in sorrow and dread, for there were few that had not some kindred or friend or acquaintance brought within the danger of the law. I would not be misconceived, as though I should say that none could live in peace. Those in high places could not be in safety, save they did own in words the Pope to be the head of the Church. But for most men it was deemed a sufficient acknowledgment thereof, that they should without protest attend duly their parish church. In this the Queen and her advisers did show a wise discretion; for seeing that every man had sworn to abjure the Pope in King Harry's reign, there had been found

many with stomachs more squeamish than the prelates of this time, and these had deemed it too hard a thing to forswear themselves. Therefore we kept silence and had our thoughts to ourselves. But for those that could not exercise this wise discretion, and for those that let their tongues wag in matters too difficult for the unlearned to understand, there was no peace; neither for such men as could not bring themselves to attend the mass.

Sir Martin did so wisely deal with his people, that in that parish no man suffered; but in the adjoining Croydon was great havoc, Dr. Astele being the cause of the death of several. These things mightily afflicted Sir Martin; and more than once Mistress Lettis waking before dawn perceived that he had not yet slept, but had passed the night at his prayers. Also he made long fasts, so that she feared he would bring on himself a feebleness of health. Ofttimes she felt assured his prayers were offered for Cecily, for whom she also had great dole.

Seeing his sad countenance, Dr. Astele waxed wroth, saying that all good Christians should rejoice that the heretics were punished, so that they

could not infect others with their wickedness; and he would upbraid Sir Martin, saying that he was but a slack friend to Holy Mother Church; "for see," said he, "the damnable wickedness of these heretics, whereof the last that I have brought to his deserved end did utter most grievous blasphemies against the Blessed Sacrament."

"My brother," said Sir Martin, "did I pray only for the good, my intercessions were soon done. Also I fear me in rooting up the tares, ye have rooted up much wheat."

Doubtless some of those that suffered in these troubles were men of that sour and intractable disposition that we now call Puritans; men that rail against government, that despise joyance, and are contrary unto all; but even these did men pity when they saw them suffering so horrible a death. Great plenty of those who died were of innocent and kindly lives and much beloved of the people, so that there was aroused through all the nation a sombre discontent.

CHAPTER XX.

MY master at this time sent me about various businesses to Burleigh, so that I saw not Wymbleton neither the people there for a long space. Returning with letters from Sir John Abraham unto my lord in the summer of the year 1558, I found myself with gladness at Wymbleton, seeing I have ever found pleasure in this place.

As I approached the village, a lively desire awoke within me once more to see Mistress Lettis; for no other maid had appeared unto me so fair and desirable. When I had made my report unto Sir William's secretary, I set forth for Sir Martin's abode. Now as I neared the little gate I saw my lady standing amid the flowers, and on her shoulder was her little Phil. In her hand she held another bird, a finch very pretty and tame. As I approached, she not perceiving me, put its beak unto her lips the while she said: "Kiss me, Harry."

My heart for joy thumped as it had been a mill-wheel, as the bird began to whistle even as I had taught my finch. I unlatched the gate and entered, and she turning, flushed over the whiteness of her skin a lovely pink, such as I have seen on the edge of a white cloud at sunset time, on the opposite side of the heavens from the sun.

"Master Sture," she said very gravely, "I wish you good-day. My uncle is within." Then hastily she added: "You see I was even forced to pity your poor bird; for maltreated by his fellows, he returned unto your room one day that I passed, as I went to wait on the Lady Mildred."

"Mistress Lettis, I am beholden to your goodness," said I, and therewith came upon me, as born out of my gladness, a foolish constraint, so that I could not say more.

Mistress Lettis experienced something of the same methinks, wherefore she again spoke hurriedly, the same feeling that took my voice away causing her to speak and pray me to come within and see Sir Martin. He was sitting reading diligently in a book lent unto him by Sir William Cecil. His face looked peaked and white, and there was about him a heaviness as of sorrow. After a while, when we

had talked somewhat, and he had learned of the new improvements at my master's house of Burleigh, and of the choice flowers, in especial some very fine red roses which we had lately had there, and he had enquired of Sir William's welfare, who was at this time in London, he waxed more cheerful, and rejoiced greatly to hear that Mr. Secretary was well. Mistress Lettis hearkened unto our discourse with pleasure, as she perceived that her uncle became of better cheer. As I went forth, she asked whether I found him not pale and worn, and added:

"Methinks, sir, you have availed to cheer him, which is very necessary for him."

I taking the occasion, said I hoped therefore she would not be ill pleased if I came soon again.

She, demurely casting down her eyes, said, "It will pleasure me, Master Sture. All that doth brighten mine uncle, rejoiceth me."

I taking courage, asked her if I had not heard her name her finch "Harry;" but at this she, as it were, ruffled her feathers like an offended bird, saying, "I enquired, sir, what name it were likely the bird would know, but methinks I shall change it," and went swiftly back into the house.

It amazed me not that Sir Martin was sad; for

there was great heaviness over all the land, and in all the country distress and trouble. The ways were very difficult and dangerous, as often times we experienced coming to and fro from my master's estate, the bridges broken down and not repaired, and among the people murders and robberies, yea even in the streets of London. The skies and the earth seemed to share in the sadness of the nation, the skies raining as if in ceaseless tears, and the earth sending up cold mists. Noxious vapours filled the air, and strange lights fluttered and danced about, more especially among the tombs, the which said Dr. Astele, did signify the fires of hell gaping for heretics; but wise men among those that suffered opined that they were the shadows of the flames that were kindled for the Protestants, and solemn warning of the wrath that should fall upon the land did these things continue.

Many men at this time fell sick of a slow and wasting fever, that spread in so subtle and dangerous a way that family after family fell away and died; and oftentimes the priest that attended the sick, sickened himself. Sir Martin looked whiter and whiter every day; and ceaslessly did he pass from house to house. Dr. Astele also spared

himself in no wise, and unto those of his own persuasion was a trustworthy, albeit a somewhat stern monitor, at their last moments.

None, as I have said, of our people had suffered punishment for their religion, Sir Martin being careful to conform unto the decrees put forth for the ordering of the services, yet in all matters where any license might be had, so comporting himself that those who could not easily stomach the papistical ways might be able to attend the church. Therefore in all his services he had as few bowings and strange forms as might be, while yet all was reverent; also he instructed the people that they should use the primers, wherein is set down the English of some parts of the service. Yet, spite of all his trying, with every news of a fresh burning certain of the people waxed fiercer and fiercer against the ceremonies for which these men and women had suffered; and every day it was harder to draw men together, the one part being constantly more set on the punishment of heretics, the other part, not frighted, but ever more and more sure that in these things must be a devilry. Yet when the sickness came on with great violence, then the love they bore to Sir Martin inclined them all to

turn unto him, that he might assoil the dying and comfort the sick.

Lady Cecil took much heed of Sir Martin at this time, oftentimes praying him to come to the house, that he might divert and recreate himself, lest he should suffer from his overmuch care for the people, also that to talk unto him lessened her own sadness of heart.

"Alas! Sir Martin," quoth she, "what deadly days be these! even King Philip's Spanish friar* did say that men were to be reclaimed by mildness; and yet have we nothing but burnings. Alack! is not my safety but a hiding of my faith? My very soul abhorreth the cruelties of the Bishop of Rome. I speak to you freely, for there be no traitors here to list; no man is with us, but my faithful Master Sture."

"Gracious Madam," said Sir Martin, "these be sore days; yet by God's grace nought hath been required of us here which we may not with a good conscience say or do. Also many a poor soul is here shielded through Sir William's favour with Cardinal Pole."

* Alphonso de Castro preaching before the Court, February 9, 1555.

"'Tis true," she said; "of a verity I trow he loveth not in his heart these severities. How cruel a thing is cowardice!"

"Madam," quoth Sir Martin, "the Cardinal and also Her Gracious Majesty have in old days suffered by the hands of those who condemned the Bishop of Rome; and such suffering doth most times engender a hate that knoweth not reason, but strikes because it hath been stricken."

"True," said she. "Also my lord doth say, 'For what thoughts men think they must account to God; and therewith to meddle, in man is nought but tyranny. For what acts men do, they are answerable unto the State, which must needs enforce uniformity and good order.' Therefore he biddeth me that I hold my peace; lest I bring danger, if not on ourselves, yet on those about us."

"'Tis a righteous counsel, Madam," said Sir Martin. "Verily unto you and yours hath the Cardinal Pole been a good and staunch friend."

Even as they talked, came a post from Sir William Cecil unto the Lady Cecil, wherein he advertised her that the Queen, whose health had for long been feeble, was suffering greatly from the fever which had lately beset her.

"Belike," said Lady Cecil, having imparted the news to Sir Martin, "this sickness will lead Her Majesty unto more leniency."

"Nay, Madam," Sir Martin made answer, sadly, "I fear me not, for she deemeth that she doeth God service."

'Twas this fever, whereof the Queen's Majesty gradually declining and having no strength to struggle against it, did die. Cardinal Pole being ill of the same sickness followed her speedily to the grave. Some men like Dr. Astele said that the Queen's death was a judgment, because the nation had dealt wickedly and had departed from the Pope, and that punishment enough had not been meted out to heretics; for these men would have had us brought into bondage unto the Spaniard and the Pope, from whom God defend us.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR some time before the Queen's death, it was evident to all that her sickness was mortal; and more and more men betook themselves unto Hatfield unto the Princess Elizabeth, who received each one with courtesy, yet set but little store by the devotion of those who followed Queen Mary till her speedy death was sure, and then deserted her to bend to the coming sovereign.

One man she received with very different cheer; and that was my master, who had been her trusty friend for so long. So soon as she had become Queen, he, first waiting to secure her interests in London, then took to her the news that the parliament and people had proclaimed her with joy and acclamation. We, his servants, accompanied him unto Hatfield, riding as swiftly as might be, though something hindered by the season of the year, the

ways being but heavy. But lo, what joy was there through all the land! what singing and lighting of bonfires, and dancing of morris dances around them, so that the country was as it were united in the keeping of one great festival! Sir William was of right excellent cheer, full of a staid merriment, and calling me to his side, would have me show him the hostel where I had refreshed me on my ride to the Princess Elizabeth, and narrate to him all the particulars of that journey.

"Thou shalt appear before the Queen's Majesty now in better guise," quoth he, and added: "the Queen hath a quick eye for a likely lad."

Now as he had been but of poor health of late, as was with him oftentimes the case, I said how glad I was to see him so much amended; whereto he answered—

"Truly of late have I rubbed on between sickness and health; but now my heart serveth me to get the mastery"; and later on he did say, "Of a surety the coming to the throne of the Princess Elizabeth shall be for the honour of Almighty God, and the prosperity of this realm."

As we passed through one village, we met a procession going unto the well of S. Aldegonde,

who, as it was said, had there worked many miracles. At the well they prayed the saint that the Queen's accession should change nothing in religion from Queen Mary's order. At this my Lord Paget did say unto Sir William that Queen Mary had returned the realm wholly Catholic; to whom Sir William answered—

"My lord, you are therein so far deceived, that I fear rather an inundation of the contrary part, so universal a boiling and bubbling I see of some stomachs that cannot yet digest the crudity of that time."*

Verily even among those that looked at the procession were some that gibed at the saint, and said that he had better have used the water of his well to put out the fires round the martyrs, and as he had not done this, his source would never wash him white of that stain, or give him power in England.

So we came unto Hatfield; and after that my master had had audience of the Queen, telling her of the joyous proclamation of her sovereignty, for the which she rendered great thanks unto God, she deigned to call for me into her presence, and

* Strype's Annals.

saying laughingly I was "a pretty fellow," bade me be as loyal in prosperity as I had been in adversity, and I might look for advancement. "Thou dost serve," added she, "my best friend and counsellor, my 'spirit of wisdom.'"

Her Grace tarried but a few days at Hatfield; and then we set forward again for London. If there were many came forth to wish us good speed on our journey down, there were twice as many that flocked from all quarters to see and make welcome to the Queen as we went towards London; yea, great store of people came forth from London itself far on the way, to meet her. Now might I note with what deft words and sweet looks she did receive all men, telling them that by God's grace she would so rule that the realm should prosper and her people be happy. When she heard one old man bless her for a bonny lass, she smiled most graciously upon him; and at one village, where the little children brought her flowers of a something common sort, and some of her following would have had her not receive them, she chid them roundly, and calling the little ones unto her thanked them, saying that there was no child's allegiance that she did not value; "And lo,

these flowers," said she, "are a sign that there is no English thing so small or common that I will not prize and tend it."

All the people round, that heard, broke forth into shouts of "Long live Queen Elizabeth!"

The nearer we got to London, the greater was the throng and tumult; nor did the dulness of the November day one whit abate their joyance. So with great state and gladness she came unto the Charterhouse, where she lodged one night, and the next afternoon she proceeded unto the Tower with music of the city waits, and speeches from Paul's scholars and others, and such delight of all the people as had been wonder to see, save that no rejoicing could be great enough to celebrate the coming in of this so mighty monarch and so perfect lady.

Now when I returned unto my lodging, this day of joy and wonder being ended, as I entered my room, with a great start I did espy before me Francis, whom we had not seen nor heard of since the Christmas that Mistress Cecily died.

"Thou, Francis! is it thou?" I said, for there was so great a change in him, that I almost doubted at the first whether it were he indeed.

His dress, that had been wont to be of so gay hue and device, was now of a sombre black and straight cut. His brows seemed to meet in one perpetual frown, that gave unto him a very sinister aspect even when he smiled; but when he spoke, there was a mocking tone in his voice, as of old.

"Surely, Harry, it is I," he answered. "The tyrant has gone to her account, drunk with the blood of the saints; and England is, I would hope, once more safe ground."

Asking him when he landed, he answered, "But yestere'en. I have come to see thee at once, Harry, taking but the time to join in the rejoicing of burning the effigy of that Antichrist the Pope."

I said methought we had had burning enough.

"Eye for eye," said he, "tooth for tooth, life for life. Oh, it was rare sport, and the cats within the figure answered for the howling of the demons. I warrant they are howling in good sooth in hell that England is safe from the devil's power. But this effigy is poor work after all. Shall there not be vengeance?"

His eyes had in them a look so wild that it disquieted me. Just then, as in old days, he broke into a song, but to my amaze, though the tune

was one we had often sung together, the words ran thus—

> "No man may him hide
> From death, hollow-eyed,
> With sinews withered,
> With bones shivered,
> With his worm-eaten maw,
> And his ghastly jaw
> Gaping aside;
> Naked of hide,
> Neither flesh nor fell." *

"Stint of thy gruesome ditty," I entreated; and he then with a laugh as unmirthful as his song, gan to ply me with questions as to all the folks of our acquaintance, and in especial as to Dr. Astele and Sir Martin; which questions I answered as shortly as might be.

"How goeth the village," he asked; "are the goats cast out from the sheep? Hath Goodman Hodge been hanged yet?"

Hodge had been seen lately in Wymbleton; but being minded to tell him as little as I could, I asked him if he had forgot that the fellow went off with the Egyptians.

"Not I," said he; "but if the wife is yet in Wymbleton, the husband is like enough to return. Hast thou seen him?"

* John Skelton.

He laughed again, when I said I looked not for such scum, and told me I had learnt it from that saint Sir Martin to despise the poorer members of the Church. Then he would have news of Dr. Astele; but there was such a malicious light in his eyes, that I told him plainly an he planned the father some harm, he were best not come to me.

"What can I do," he asked, "a just returned exile?"

At last he left me; and I being glad thereof, thought of him no more, having things of much more interest to employ me, such as the grand processions after Christmas, when the Queen came from the Tower unto Somerset House, and again unto Westminster with great rejoicings and pageants. All the streets were strewed again fresh with gravel; and there was a pageant of King Henry and Queen Anne, and another of King Henry and King Edward VI., and the people did cry out greatly: "God save the Queen!" with such throwing up of caps, and such bonfires as did exceed all ever seen before. Not the cold of the winter or aught else could daunt men, that they gazed not their fill on the fairest woman and greatest

Queen that hath ever blessed a nation. She, in a very rich dress of purple velvet, seemed as though the gladness of her heart preserved her from all inclemency of the weather. She spoke to many as she went along; and unto the old men she said she hoped as good times and better should come for England as any they had ever known; and unto the goodly little boys that made a pageant in Cornhill, she said that they should haste to grow up and serve her as loyally as they did now speak featly, which pleased them much.

In January was the coronation, with the bishops in scarlet, mitred and in their copes; and after, there was a great banquet, where we served the ladies as beseemeth those that be bound to a Queen. Here I served a very fair and pleasing damsel; yet had she not for me the charms of Mistress Lettis.

New in content, the days passed very swiftly; and the very seasons seemed also to rejoice, the spring coming early. Sir William, who had all this time been busy with state affairs, and daily in council with the Queen, bid me that I should go to Wymbleton to see how Lady Cecil and his

children fared, and bring him word of their state. I therefore, taking boat as far as Putney, from thence rode across the heath with a few followers, and arriving, found all well.

The next day being the festival of the Annunciation, Sir Martin made us a very goodly sermon; and afterward a chapman came with his wares into the churchyard, having a very fine collection, such as Spanish pins and laces, and kirtles and kerchiefs of many colours. There I swiftly espied Mistress Lettis buying a little kerchief of blue. The smile had come back to her mouth and the rose-petal colour to her cheeks, and the little light laugh to her lips, that I was wont to hear when first we were acquaint. Now methought she was seventy times fairer than of yore. All that love, that I had held in check by long absence and thoughts of advancement and of work to do, came in upon me like a flood; so that I wondered how I could ever have borne life without her.

I greeted Sir Martin very reverently; and he was fain to hear news of Sir William, also of all that which had been done at the Court. When I began to tell of the Queen and of the pageants, and of all her graciousness, and of the magnifi-

cence of the Court and of the joy of the people, of bonfires and dances and the gay kirtles of the ladies and the brave attire of the gentlemen, then Mistress Lettis left her buying and considered no more the kerchiefs, listening with a great intentness to these matters, which do much delight maidens; and she would know what like was the Queen, and of all her splendour of dress; and she laughed with glee to hear of her gracious speeches and of the people's comfort. At last Sir Martin bid me come home with them that they might hear more; and the chapman fearing that his wares were forgot, prayed Mistress Lettis that she would choose her kerchief.

"I care not which," she said.

Then I ventured to take a little rose kerchief, very pale, and asked that I might present it to her in memory of these glad days when all things did seem of very roseate hue.

She receiving it, I was glad at heart.

As we would wend us home, there came swift hobbling an old crone, and Lettis spoke to her kindly.

"Come quick, nurse, that I buy thee a fairing," she said.

She came very quickly and gladly; but when she looked upon the face of the chapman she gave a great start.

"The saints save us from evil," cried she. "I want nought of this man."

He looked at her with a scowl. "Harm not a poor packman in his craft;" he said, "else mayest thou thyself suffer harm, old hag."

At this she seemed frightened, and when Lettis asked her what she meant and if she knew aught against the man, she said confusedly, "Naught, naught! He minded me of some one I knew, but it is nothing."

So Lettis bought her fairing, a petticoat of red, and we went our way.

When we were well out of sight of the churchyard, we saw the woman following us very swiftly, and calling, "Mistress Lettis! Mistress Lettis! Hearken, I pray." So we waited till she came panting.

"Pretty one, my dove," she said, "there is danger abroad. Hodge hath been back these two days, and he mutters evil things. He will not tell us what he meaneth, but it is some harm. And that fellow selling his wares is a naughty fellow,

a conjurer—he can do sorceries. Pray Heaven he know not that I have told thee, or he will wither me away, and my flesh shall shrink and my bones crackle. He came last night; and I heard Father Astele's name, as I came into the house from drawing water. Then they stopped their talk, and Hodge miscalled and struck me. Bid Dr. Astele that he beware. Take ye heed to yourselves; and I pray thee, my love, my nursling, wear this charm that thy old nurse hath got thee."

She spoke all in a breath without stopping, and then thrusting her charm into Lettis' hand, hobbled off as quickly as she could, looking on all sides, as though she feared to be seen by the chapman or Hodge.

The charm was in a little bag curiously wrought, and hung by a string. Lettis put it round her neck.

"I will wear it for my foster-mother's sake," said she; "though my uncle saith he doubteth whether God would allow the power unto these senseless things to harm or to aid us."

But she owned at my asking, that great wonders oft had happened by reason of charms, for the

moon hath a marvellous power, and that which hath lain in its beams is of excellent virtue; and this is well known in my Devon country.

Sir Martin had gone on before us, and when he heard the tale, he forthwith despatched a little lad that he should go with as much speed as he might to Croydon and warn Dr. Astele that he should be on his guard; "for of a truth," said Sir Martin, "thy uncle Stephen hath many that fain would harm him, seeing that he did think it of his duty in the late reign to act with much severity."

Since Queen Elizabeth had come to the throne, Dr. Astele had said many words that might bring him into trouble. There were as yet no changes in the order of the services; but Dr. Astele, hearing that the Queen, during the celebration of the Mass before her, had prohibited the elevation of the host, hotly railed against the Church, saying—

"Thinkest thou this is but a slight thing? I tell thee matters shall yet advance, till ye be clean gone into the ways of heresy. Martin, ye are all but time-servers and feeble deceivers; seeing that ye can abide in peace both in the evil days of King Edward's wicked advisers, the blessed reconciliation of Queen Mary with the Holy

Father, and now the half-hearted cunning of this ill-born woman."

"My brother," asked Sir Martin, "came thy authority as priest from the King or from God? Is not our Lord present in the Sacrament when I do celebrate?"

"Pray God," answered Dr. Astele, "thou art not yet arrived so far as to doubt it."

"Well," said Sir Martin, "there is then no new and strange Church here, but that one to which Christ cometh, and therein will I remain."

Then Dr. Astele railed against him for sophistical arguments, and both here and at Croydon used so many rash and wild words as might well put him in danger. Sir Martin speaking of the hate against Dr. Astele, I did remember with uneasiness that Francis was now in the land, and how he had made enquiry concerning Dr. Astele and Sir Martin, and this I told Sir Martin; but of danger to himself we thought not, neither he nor I.

Therefore having sent unto Dr. Astele, we feared nothing more; but I mightily diverted them both with relation of all that had chanced at the Court.

When I had departed Lettis said to her uncle—

"You deem well of Master Sture, do you not, Uncle?"

"Truly, my child," said he. "I have watched him for long, and have enquired of Sir William Cecil concerning him; and I think that he is worthy, and hath gained in strength of character." Then he drew her to him and kissed her.

She, dancing for lightness of heart, went to gather the early spring flowers in the garden; and "Ah," she said, "how wondrous bright is this spring morning!"

CHAPTER XXII.

ON the next day towards mid-day, as I stood in Lady Cecil's antechamber, brightening my sword of Toledo, a page came to tell me that Mistress Lettis Alanson asked audience of Lady Cecil. I hastened out, that I might greet her, who did now occupy all my thoughts. Lo, her face was of the whiteness of a cerement, and her eyes had a scared look in them.

"Master Sture," she said, "they have ta'en my uncle to prison."

"Dr. Astele?" I asked.

"Nay, nay," she answered, "my uncle Martin."

Much amazed and wrathful, I asked who had dared do this.

"Master Francis Fowell hath contrived the thing," she said. "He came with armed men with his mocking smile, and withal very vengeful

because he had sought Dr. Astele and found him not."

I asked what charge he could bring against Sir Martin, assuring her that it must soon be disproven, but she said—

"Sir, I know not what harm he may work against my honoured, dear uncle, my more than father. He saith he can prove treason against him, and eke against mine uncle Stephen. He would not even tell where they did design to take him."

Then said I, "I will follow them—I will trace their way," and prayed her to come but to Lady Cecil, that I might ask leave to go and search out this wickedness.

Lady Cecil sat among her children with her broidery, wherein she did as much excel as in learning.

She asked what we would, with a smile that included us both; and when Mistress Lettis had rehearsed the matter, waited not till I proffered my request, but at once bade me go after the men.

"Haste you, Master Sture," she said. "Take with you men if you need them, and order these

fellows, by Sir William Cecil's authority, to loose Sir Martin. 'Tis like they will make their way to Mr. Justice Pennell, being the nearest justice that might make out his committal to prison. Use all despatch."

Then said little Mistress Elizabeth, that pretty, forward imp, "Go Sture, catch the naughty men and kill them, and bring back our dear Sir Martin."

My lady bid her not be so forward; but she kissed her too, while she said, "Lettis, dear child, stay with me, and fear not; we will not let thine honoured uncle suffer. 'Tis an outrageous insolence that they have dared to arrest him."

Mistress Lettis kissed her hands and thanked her; and this kindness unlocking the stream of her tears that had been frozen by horror, they streamed forth from her hyacinth blue eyes, and each round drop that fell did fire my heart with new resolution to end this villainy.

Making my obeisance, I hurried forth, determined to bring Sir Martin back speedily, only just tarrying to ask how many were the party, and which way they had gone.

"Six mounted men," said Lettis, "and they took

the way by the heath. Master Sture, be speedy, I pray you."

I mounted me in haste, taking some stout fellows with me, and set forth. Some of the villagers had seen the horsemen; but they had ridden so fast through the village that no one had known that Sir Martin was among them. I followed their track some way across the heath, and then lost all sign of them, coming on hard ground. Then I made my way to Mr. Justice Pennell, hoping there to find them, but no man had been there that day. Neither at any hamlet could I hear news; so that after many enquiries, and riding backwards and forwards, I grew much crest-fallen.

Considering what I could do next, I remembered the chapman, and the old nurse's warning. The chapman had gone, no man knew where. I lighted down at the cottage; and forth came Dame Hodge wringing her hands.

"Alack, sir," she answered to my questions, "I know naught of my husband. Ah, well a day that my man should be such a villain! 'Twas not for nothing the black cat cried, and I stumbled on the threshold."

When I had caused her cease her wailing, which

was a hard matter, I asked her again when she last saw her husband.

"He came not within all yesterday," she said. "I misdoubted me he was brewing some evil when he did say, mocking, he was going to see the sights, and belike find a traitor's head. 'Nay,' quoth I, 'there be none there now;' and he grinned and girded at me saying, 'There be fools enow and men that have looked high that shall rot in a dungeon, as surely as if their pate were hoisted on a pole, and that is the merriest sight in London, and these be merry times when Master Fowell gives a man his pay.'"

At these words I tarried no more, but left her standing there, bidding her merely that she should cheer up, for she had stumbled on good service with that word, and in London would I find them. With that I hied me back to Lady Cecil and Mistress Lettis, to advise them that of almost certainty we should find them in London, seeing that Francis had bidden Hodge repair there, for the doing of some ill deed.

Lady Cecil bade me mount at once, and ride to London as swiftly as I could, and there should Sir William give instant order for the good man's release.

"Fear not, Lettis," she said; "'tis but a matter of a few days."

"God willing," said I, "I will very quickly bring him back with me. All that a man can do, I will."

"I trust you, Master Sture," she said; "but oh beware Master Fowell's guile. Save my uncle, but guard yourself too."

These words I assured her truly were as good as a talisman, so stout a heart did they give me. With that we parted.

That night I lay at Fulham, rising with the dawn to pursue my journey, so that it was yet early when I arrived in London. Betaking me to my master, he gave me instant authority to set free Sir Martin, wherever he might be. I going forth with good hope, made enquiry at the Fleet, at the Counter and at Ludgate, but nowhere could I hear any tidings of him, though I sought all day long, even until night fell. I began to be sore afraid lest Francis had made the pretence of arresting him, in order that he might make away with him secretly.

If I could find Hodge, I knew that I could so frighten him that he would tell all he knew; there-

fore I bethought me to what haunts he was likeliest to betake him. Deeming that he might be found with the mob at a whipping, I companied a woman through many streets who was whipped at the cart's tail for beating of a child; but I found him not. Neither could I hear anything of Francis or his followers. Sir William's servants fared no better, though he sent out several of them to make diligent search and enquiry.

My feet were weary of pacing the streets, my heart was still more weary of fruitless searchings, when on the third day a servant of Sir William's heard news that a parish priest had been accused of treason before Mr. Justice Notall, a very hard, stern man. Making instant haste, I betook me towards Mr. Notall's house, when lo, as I passed a narrow place where some vagabonds were playing thimble-rig, there with his mouth agape, ever drawing closer and closer to the players and his hand feeling in his pocket, I spied Hodge. I had with me my trusty Luke, and bidding him follow me close, I seized the rapscallion by the collar, and cried—

"All good citizens help! In the name of Sir William Cecil I do arrest this man, who is guilty

of endless knaveries, perchance of the life of a good and loyal citizen."

The fellow began to bluster, but he had none of his friends in the crowd; or if he had they were of the same sort as himself, and ready to desert him in danger; and when he felt a strong hand and saw Luke behind me, being coward to the core, he began to blubber and whine, and protest that he knew nothing of what I meant, and had seen nor heard naught of Sir Martin, thus showing he could well divine of what I accused him.

The place was not proper for much questioning; wherefore I bade Luke have him along with haste to Sir William's lodging. This we did, he groaning, roaring, and resisting, that he made the street ring with his din; and the folk flocked together to watch us. We got him there at last, and Sir William came forth into the outer chamber. Then Hodge fell on his knees, beseeching for mercy, and crying that he had meant no harm, but had done all at the bidding of Master Fowell.

Being questioned what it was he had done, he owned that he had recited before the justice words that he had heard Sir Martin say in preaching, teaching the people for conscience sake they ought

to disobey the King. Also he had said openly, speaking to the people on the heath, that the Lady Elizabeth had no title to the throne. Being told that therein he lied grossly and slandered an innocent man, he owned that the speech had end "no title superior to the Lady Mary," but declared that Master Fowell stopped him before he could add these words, telling him that he had said enough.

Further interrogated, he averred that Master Fowell had told much worse things, and that the justice, holding up his hands, had cursed Sir Martin for a pestilent fellow. He did solemnly asseverate with many oaths, that having been taken to the house by Master Fowell, he knew neither the name of the justice or the place of his abode, nor what had been done with Sir Martin. In this I doubt not he spoke truth, both because he was a stupid fellow, and also that he would gladly have given any information he could in the hope to save his own base hide.

As we could gain no more from him, my master committed him to the Counter for his misdeeds, to the which he was taken howling. I sped off then promptly to Mr. Justice Notall. By ill chance he had ridden forth that morn to Westminster, and

perforce I must wait till the morrow. Now on the morrow Sir William Cecil must needs travel on the Queen's business. "This," said he, "shall be no let to the safe deliverance of Sir Martin. Commend me to Mr. Notall, and tell him that I shall think myself his debtor if he will give immediate order that Sir Martin be released from prison; for that in aught that hath been brought against him I dare aver he hath been grievously slandered."

The next morn I went to wait on Mr. Notall. Such ado had I to win to his presence, it could not have been greater an it had been the Queen's herself. Methought his lacqueys and gentlemen seemed with malice to hinder me. When at last I was admitted to the chamber where he sat, I found him a man somewhat advanced in years, of a stern and rough aspect. He asked me rudely what I would, speaking in a harsh tone as though I were a criminal; also he thoued me discourteously. I told him that Sir William Cecil had information that the priest of Wymbleton, Sir Martin Astele, had been brought before him on some charge.

"What of that!" said he. "The rogue is sentenced, as I would all false-hearted priests were,

What a fool's errand is this, to hinder me from my morning ride! Get thee gone."

With that I prayed him to listen, but he did but storm, and would have left me, had I not cried out loudly—

"Shall I say to Sir William Cecil Mr. Notall will not hear his message?"

He turned him back then, saying, "Why the plague couldst thou not have said thou didst come from Sir William Cecil?" although he had known it from the first. "What saith mine honoured Mr. Secretary?"

I rehearsed his message that he did pray Sir Martin might be loosed instantly, seeing that he had been wronged, and that Sir William would hold himself bounden therefor unto Mr. Notall.

"Bounden! bounden!" said he, "I trow not. The man hath spoken treason against her most gracious Majesty; yea, and hath hatched plots against her. Mr. Secretary is too good a servant of the Queen to wish such a man free. Go to, go to! say no more. I will expound the matter unto Sir William when he returneth."

With that he dismissed me; and the varlets grinned as I went forth. There was natheless a

discreet young gentleman there, something known to my uncle, and who did shortly after, on a favourable opportunity, leave Mr. Notall's household. He followed me to the antechamber, and speaking low, he said—

"If you would save your friend, bethink you of some means to do so speedily. Mr. Notall loveth not your master. It may chance when he returns, Mr. Notall will courteously grieve that he cannot oblige him with the release of Sir Martin as the man is dead."

I did utter an exclamation.

"Hush!" said he; "Master Francis Fowell hath been here. He is a friend of the justice. Advise you what you will do. Search at the Counter."

Some of his companions coming up, he said loudly, "Go you not to the Ordinary to-day? Give you good den then," and turned away quickly, preventing all further speech.

I took my way to the Counter, and demanded admittance. The gaoler, a very surly fellow, refused me; nor would he tell me who were confined there, or if Sir Martin was among them. It was, I deemed, waste of time to stay and

argue with him; and Sir William, being absent, there was but one way left. Taking boat, I betook me to Greenwich to the Queen. As I was known to be of the household of Sir William Cecil, I was admitted at once to the chamber, where many did wait till Her Majesty should come forth from her closet.

I stood and waited with the rest; and as I looked around the chamber I thought for a moment that I espied Francis among a crowd at a distance; but the thing seemed incredible, and ere I could get near unto him, the man who had appeared to resemble my cousin was gone.

When the moment came that the Queen should show herself, I placed me so that, falling on my knees, I might be near to her path when she had spoken with the chief of those present. She issued forth presently, radiant as the sun, her attire of dazzling white strewn with pearls, and on her neck a very large pearl that scarce exceeded it in whiteness.* She spoke, as I could hear, in very gracious tones to several on her way, raising one or two with her hand. At the

* There are very varying accounts of Queen Elizabeth's complexion, perhaps referring to different periods of her life.

last, as she came near to me, I had the boldness to exclaim—

"Madam, a petition!"

She glanced at me as if astonished at this address, yet smiled when she recognized me saying—

"My trusty and bold messenger? Speak, man."

I said that I had come on an errand of mercy and justice, the twin sisters that lay, I knew, nearest to her Grace's heart, and that I spoke on behalf of a loyal subject imprisoned under false accusation.

"Tell your tale plainly," she said. "God's death! I will suffer no such deeds."

I related all, avouching on my life that Sir Martin had been wronged, and telling how he had been seized and borne from his home with violency and secrecy.

She listened attentively, but when I said Sir Martin's name she frowned, and turning to those about her, asked—

"Heard we not of this matter?"

One of the maidens, a fair damsel, but with a haughty and unpleasing visage, answered swiftly—

"May it please your Majesty, Master Francis

Fowell spoke of the man as a most dangerous traitor."

I wondered how Francis had had skill to introduce himself at the Court; and my heart glowed with anger.

The Queen bade call him, saying as she bent her brows: "Master Fowell hath been commended unto us as a worthy and loyal gentleman. You are bold to challenge his averments."

Francis was gone, and they found him not; but there came the same young gentleman who had so long ago deceived me at Lady Pembroke's house in the matter of Mistress Cecily; and craving permission to speak, with a malicious smile, he said—

"I marvel, your Majesty, that there can be found one bold enough to tax your patience on behalf of this Sir Martin, who basely and horribly declared that your most gracious Majesty's title to the throne is nought; and who is in league with a vile Popish priest, his brother, who did in open London miscall your most gracious Majesty with words that I dare not repeat."

"S'death, sir," said the Queen. "Mouth not your speech thus. In brief, what said he?"

"Craving then your pardon, Madam, that I

sully my lips therewith, he did declare the Lady Elizabeth an heretic bastard."

Ha!" cried she, with all her face aflame, "what say you to this?"

"Madam," I answered, "his brother's horrid and treasonable speech is not his fault. The words that have been charged unto himself are slanders."

"And will you also deny," said his accuser, "that he did aid and comfort that vile priest, admitting him to his house, and sending him warning that he might fly from justice?"

"By my halidome," said the Queen, "you have presumed on my clemency. Go, lest I bid you follow him to prison."

I thought of Lettis. "Madam," said I, moving not, "let your Majesty's displeasure light on my poor head, albeit that is worse than prison and death, sooner than that your Grace should lose by slander so true and loyal a servant as Sir Martin Astele. Hear me, Madam, yet a moment, I implore, by your justice and by your goodness."

She paused amazed, and I not waiting even for permission to speak, and in desperation bold, went on—

"This man that slanders Sir Martin, this Francis Fowell, was he that at the late King Edward's death did set on me, my master's messenger, lest tidings should reach your Grace.' He hath a deceiving, subtle tongue, but I know that his heart is evil, while for Sir Martin I can prove his loyalty."

"Go on," she said; "'tis at your peril if you cannot make your words good."

"Madam," said I, "had he been a traitor, Sir William Cecil had not trusted him in matters concerning your Majesty's safety. Mr. Secretary doth vouch for his loyalty."

"'Tis something;" said she, "yet the wisest may be deceived."

"Your Majesty," I said further, "Sir Martin hath a brother a priest, who was high in favour at Queen Mary's court."

"And who speaketh treason," interposed the maid of honour softly.

The Queen tapped with her foot upon the ground. "In sooth a fine title to my mercy," she said.

"Of that brotherhood, Madam," I went on, "did he make use to carry from my master a

message taken by a child in flowers, unto one whom just fate hath now brought from a prison to be the most potent and glorious monarch of the earth."

While I spoke the ladies and attendants watched with amaze how her face changed, not knowing of what I spoke.

"'Twas this Sir Martin that planned and conveyed unto me that message in the prison?" she asked.

"Yea, truly, your Majesty," I answered.

"Why said you not at once who the man was?" she cried. "My trusty Mr. Secretary hath spoken of him more than once. God's death! He who hath dared to imprison him shall rue it. Varlet," quoth she to the young gentleman who with great quaking stammered forth excuses, "thou hast aspersed an honest man. I believe nought of thy tale. Get thee gone from our sight. Thou art dismissed from thine office. Go you, Master Sture, and fetch forth the good man."

Then she gave me her hand to kiss, saying, "I thank you for your brave loyalty."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEING armed with such authority, I hied me to the Counter, assured of a very different reception from that which was last given me. Indeed the gaoler was very much afraid, on being admonished that it was the Queen's order I should be admitted, and Sir Martin brought forth. He would have had me rest in a little chamber nigh the gate, saying, "Worshipful sir, will it but please you to tarry a short while, I will bring forth Sir Martin."

His oily manner misliking me as much as his greasy jerkin and ill-kept hose, I mistrusted his too apparent anxiety, and resolved to see with mine own eyes how it fared with Sir Martin.

Within the prison was an uproar as of demons, which smote the louder on our ears as we advanced. We entered a very vile courtyard, which though it was exposed to the open air, yet had so filthy a stench as I have seldom smelt. Whereof was small wonder; for there amidst all sorts of dirt

and refuse were crowded together villains of the baser sort, some whose rags scarce hung together. Those who had money were filled with victuals and much drink bought of the gaoler; and some that could not compass good food were eating ill-smelling and vile meats brought by friends as poor as themselves; and others were lean with starvation. The most part were now howling like madmen, and leaping and struggling the one against the other as trying to reach some one that stood at the end of the court,—at the first I could not see whom. I heard a voice I knew above the tumult, and did espy Francis standing on a little barrel that raised him above the people and hounding them on.

"Tear him down," he cried. "Seize him. At him, my men. That is the caitiff that loveth the papist. Remember thy scourged back, Hodge."

The crowd a little parting, I saw Sir Martin, bleeding from the wound of a stone. Close beside him a few fellows were defending him. "He hath given us his bread in the prison. Touch him not," they shouted; "he hath prayed for us, and taught us."

But those that fought for him were for the most part of the lean, and ill-fed, and sickly, and starving, and had not the strength of the other wretches.

I called to the gaoler, "Bring him safe, or thou shalt die;" and he, cursing and raging, plunged into the throng, beating about him with a great stick with a leathern thong at the end. I pushed my way after him through the thick mass of men.

"Master Fowell," cried the gaoler, "you will ruin us all. Forbear." But he would not cease desperately to urge these creatures that were as mad as raging fiends. Hodge, in especial, who did fear Francis more than any living thing, made forward, flourishing a great jagged stick with nails. Quite close to Sir Martin there was a lad of perchance seventeen years, very thin and pinched,—one of those that most boldly yet with the least strength defended the priest. Hodge uplifted the stick to strike the lad out of his way, and the blow had surely fallen on his head, but that Sir Martin lifted him with both arms round him and set him on one side, saying, and that with a faint smile—

"Strike not the boy. Thy vengeance is for me."

The base caitiff smote him down as he spoke; and from the wounds of the nails the blood gushed forth as he lay prone and still.

The gaoler and I had at last made ourselves heard, crying in the Queen's name, and threatening all that they should be hanged; and there came a

lull and frightened silence, in which I heard Francis cry in triumph, "Too late, good Harry. One vengeance is done. The next will come."

"Arrest that man!" I cried; but the sullen crowd had parted already before him; and though the gaoler afterwards miscalled and punished his men for that they had let him go, methinks he was but slack in the business, and Francis passed out.

I knelt down by Sir Martin to see whether life were left in him. The lad, weeping very pitifully, said: "Would God I had died, who have small comfort in living, sooner than he, that hath made this hell bearable."

I bade him help me lift Sir Martin to bear him to some fitter place; and ordered that naughty gaoler that he should provide us a chamber as meet as might be in his evil abode, for one the Queen did honour; for still, though he moved not nor spoke, I hoped I might find life in him.

We staunched the blood and bound up his wounds; and after a while he stirred faintly and opened his eyes, which first falling upon the lad, "Safe, my child!" he said, and smiled, and then closed his eyes again, and passed into a swoon lasting even longer than the first. I told the gaoler to let the lad go for a physician; and the boy started with most

excellent haste, returning with one Master Ewart, of some note. He, reviving Sir Martin with essences and cordials, gave hope that his hurt might not be fatal.

By and by, being a little come to himself, he spoke again, and knew and thanked me. His thoughts were very much engaged with the lad, in so much that praying me earnestly not to let the boy go back to the prison, I feared his life would ebb with his words, so hard was it to him to speak. I could see that he feared these base fellows would wreck their spite on any one that he had helped, and said the lad, "He hath saved me from them often times, and from worse than death."

Therefore I took it on myself to promise that the youth should be enlarged, seeing that he was imprisoned but for a slight offence, and knowing that my master would gladly do this for his friend.

The place where we were was very unmeet for a sick man; and being advised by the physician we procured a litter, and conveyed Sir Martin to Sir William Cecil's house. I bid the youth come also, answering to the gaoler for him. This base fellow was now very cringing and humble, begging that no harm might come to him, sith he had only done his duty, and swearing that he knew naught of Master Fowell's ill intent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR MARTIN suffered much in the journey from house to house; and we feared once more that life was departing from him swiftly. All that day he lay between life and death; but on the morn he was slightly better. On that morrow my master returned, and grieved sore to find his friend in such a plight. Sir Martin could speak to him, and also was able to receive a comforting message of good cheer from the Queen. Her Majesty bade make strict search for Francis, and it had fared ill with him had he been found; but he had friends and ways of escape, and had betaken himself to safe hiding.

After the space of two days Lady Cecil came to London to abide with her husband, and also for certain ceremonies at Court, and of her thoughtful kindness she brought with her Lettis. A

post had advertised them of Sir Martin's imprisonment and hurt; but the little maid, in her joy that he was found, and because her nature ever turned towards hopefulness, had not thought to find him so sore ill as it proved he was. Therefore there was naught but joy in her face when she arrived. She thanked me with a most marvellous shining in her eyes for that I had rescued him, and, on my saying somewhat of the love I bore him, called me "true knight and friend."

Then I bid her be prepared to see him of an extreme weakness; and so we entered into his chamber. On that morn he had a little more of strength, and was glad at sight of Lettis and pressed her hand. Alack the day! the mending did not increase; with each fresh morn our hopes of his recovery lessened and my little love's countenance grew sadder. Though perchance towards evening some flicker of life's candle would flame into brightness, through the night it would wane again.

On the fourth morn he did desire to speak with Sir William Cecil; after which, being much fatigued, he rested till eventide, and then bade call me. I found Lettis beside him, and she giving him a

cordial, he raised himself and bid me come near and said—

"Master Sture, take the thanks and blessing of a dying man."

He paused awhile because words were difficult to him; and then turning slowly to Lettis and taking her hand, said unto me—

"Thou lovest my child."

She flushed a rosy red, but spoke not.

"More than my life," I answered.

Then said he, "Sir William Cecil speaketh well of thee, and I believe thee worthy. Take her, and make her happy."

I looked at her, but she, not loud lest she should tire him, but sadly said: "Oh, Uncle, more than father, I can think now of none but you. God will give you to me for yet a little while."

"I shall die, my child," he said. "I cannot speak more. Dost thou love him?"

She weeping silently, but resisting not, he put her hand in mine, and I did swear, God helping me, to cherish her always.

After this he fell into a great weakness, and signed that we should send for Sir William's chaplain, that he might receive the last sacraments.

This he did with great devotion; so that the chaplain, with tears in his eyes, did say that he had never seen so devout and beautiful a readiness to die.

Towards ten of the clock, we being all about his bed, he smiled at my master and mistress, and thanked them for all their goodness through many years; and turning to the poor lad he bade him weep not over much, and said that Sir William had promised to care for him. A little later he pressed Lettis' hand and bade her good-bye; and then said, "Thank God for all His mercies." He lay quiet awhile after this, and his breathing was so faint that we scarce knew whether he lived or not; till suddenly he said with amazing force, "Christ, receive me," and falling back spake no more; but there came upon his face a rapt look of peace as of one who sees angels, and his breath failing gradually, we knew not the moment that he passed away.

Thus died this good man by the hand of a caitiff villain. In all the years that I have lived, I have never known his like for kindliness and truth. . . .

Now have I lived many years in contentment with

the best wife and companion that did ever bless a man, being also well-to-do, for that mine uncle at his death did leave unto me house and moneys, and having sons and daughters born unto me of goodly promise. It hath been my lot to serve her most gracious Majesty in war both in the unhappy country of Ireland, and in that fight wherein the most excellent Sir Philip Sydney lost his life. In that contest my trustiest follower was the lad that Sir Martin befriended in the prison, who hath remained always with me since my marriage, and hath requited with rare gratitude the protection which I have given him. Dame Hodge hath waited on my wife, and showed herself of the same devotion which she proved erst to Lettis. She grieved strangely for Hodge, when he was hung for his misdeeds.

Shortly after the tenth year of Her Majesty's reign, when the Pope had, by his wicked designs against Her Grace, stirred up evil men all over the kingdom, there came to us strange news from Devon. There had been discovered a popish priest plotting against the kingdom; and foremost in tracking him and striving to bring him to punishment was an old Devon man, but lately returned

to it, one Francis Fowell. For long the Father eluded all search; but at the last, Francis receiving tidings late at night that he was in hiding in a very lonely hut, and fearing to wait for help lest his prey should escape him, tracked the priest to his hiding-place alone.

Francis not returning, on the next day search was made, and the two were found locked together in their dying struggle, and now cold and stiff. Dr. Astele's dagger was buried in Francis' side, and Francis' dead hand griped the priest's throat with a grasp which could not be loosened. He had also sore wounded his foe with his sword, which must have been wrenched from him and dropped at the last, since it lay a space apart. . . . So these two died each by the hand of the other.

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SEETHING DAYS

A ROMANCE OF TUDOR TIMES